



The Task Force in the News

Media Highlights

Feb. 14, 2006 – Feb. 21, 2006

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MOVIES: GOING FOR 'BROKEBACK'

Feb 20, 2006 issue

"Brokeback Mountain" is many things, according to critics. Breathtaking. Tragic. Heart-wrenching. Turns out it's ripe for comedy, too. In early January, even when filmgoers' awareness of "that gay cowboy movie" was low, there were Photoshop posters that replaced Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal's iconic denim-and-Stetsons pose with Tom DeLay and Jack Abramoff ("Kickback Mountain"), and Skeletor and He-Man ("Grayskull Mountain").

Now there are Brokeback "mash-ups"—homemade trailer parodies that recast existing movies as tales of forbidden male love. One, "Top Gun 2: Brokeback Squadron," hints at what Tom Cruise and Val Kilmer do belowdecks when not piloting fighter jets. By last week, more than a million people had downloaded "Brokeback to the Future," an Emerson College comedy troupe's re-envisioning of Marty McFly and Doc Brown as time-traveling, star-crossed lovers. They're sophomoric takes with high production values, made possible by newly cheap video software and the public's seemingly bottomless appetite for a giggle.

But not everyone finds the mash-ups funny. **The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force denounced the trailers as homophobic, and distracting from real-world civil-rights issues.** Others disagree: "I don't find it offensive; it's actually very inclusive," says Neil Giuliano, president of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. "When a film or TV show crosses over into a large national discussion, it's going to be fodder for satire, and that's OK."

—Nick Summers

CITY LIMITS.ORG

TRANS-FORMING HOMELESS SERVICES: NEW POLICY AIMS TO PROTECT CLIENTS

Department of Homeless Services will now house transgender shelter residents according to their identity, rather than birth gender

By Abby Aguirre

week of Feb 13, 2006

After three years of talks with advocates for the transgender homeless, the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) has announced a dramatic policy change that assigns transgender homeless clients to city shelters according to gender identity, rather than birth gender.

Under previous intake practices, trans clients were often asked for legal identification and sent to a corresponding shelter. As a result, many experienced dangerous and degrading treatment at the hands of other shelter residents and staff [see "Transgender Homeless Seek Safety," *City Limits* magazine January/February 2005]. All-male facilities like the 954-bed Ward's Island shelter were considered particularly unsafe.

"We've had women coming out of Ward's Island who report having been gang-raped and beaten up," said Jay Toole, a transgender veteran of the city shelters and an organizer at Queers for Economic Justice (QEJ), one of three groups who led the campaign.

Under the new policy, staff at intake shelters will receive training on diversity, transgender and intersex issues. Training will be implemented in phases and include staff at city intake shelters managed by private nonprofits as well as security personnel.

"This policy reinforces DHS' commitment to making sure all people experiencing temporary homelessness can get the help they need in safe and respectful environment where clients are treated with understanding, dignity and respect," said Angela Allen, a spokesperson for DHS.

Local advocates applauded the announcement. "I'm walking on a cloud," said Toole. "Things are being set right. It's just too big to put into words."

While QEJ, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center (LGBT Center) and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) spent three years negotiating with DHS, advocates say talks became considerably more fruitful last September, when shelter directors endorsed the change.

"The shelter directors confirmed that the policy change would be a good thing," said Carrie Davis, coordinator of the LGBT Center's Gender Identity Project. "Basically DHS' people on the frontlines said 'we can do this.'"

In October, the groups sent Mayor Bloomberg a letter, signed by over 30 organizations such as the Coalition for the Homeless, the Empire State Pride Agenda and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, demanding an overhaul of city practices. DHS announced the imminent policy change in December.

"It was dramatic," said Davis. "In three years we've really seen a change in the way New York City handles trans clients."

While similar policies have been adopted in San Francisco, Boston and Toronto, advocates say New York City's policy is

now the most progressive in the country. “I’m really proud of it,” said Dean Spade, founder of SRLP. “It’s the best I’ve seen. It spells everything out, and it’s really significant that the written policy came with a commitment to train and evaluate. I can’t think of a more important victory for our community.”

The next step, advocates say, is to ensure the policy is implemented effectively, and to push for periodic, mandatory training for all staff throughout the shelter system, to be conducted by transgender people, who best understand the population’s needs. “All of us really believe it’s critical that the city bring in trans people to do any training,” said Toole. “So that’s the next goal.”



Saturday, February 11, 2006

Pope offers thoughts about love, marriage

First encyclical, 'God Is Love,' praised as profound, poignant

By Richard N. Ostling

Associated Press

Just in time for Valentine's Day, Pope Benedict XVI issued an encyclical letter on love.

Popular prejudice thinks a Roman Catholic priest talking about human love is "like a blind man talking about colors," Archbishop Paul Josef Cordes, president of the Vatican's council for charity, told reporters with a humorous touch unusual for Vatican news conferences.

Turns out, a celibate, 78-year-old pontiff has perceptive things to say in his first encyclical "Deus Caritas Est" ("God Is Love"). Moreover, he says them with a clarity that could begin notable improvement in papal writings, and at half the length of the average John Paul II encyclical.

The Tablet, a British Catholic weekly that doesn't necessarily cheer Roman edicts, said Benedict provided "an easy read" and a "profound, lucid, poignant and at times witty discussion."

Benedict builds upon an important statement from one of those often-neglected books of the Bible: "God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him" (1 John 4:16).

So, what is love, which Benedict considers "one of the most frequently used and misused of words"?

He believes human love reflects God's love for humanity and should balance two aspects conveyed by different Greek words for love: eros (physical or erotic love) and agape (pronounced uh-GAH-pay, meaning an unselfish spiritual bond). The New Testament fuses the second term with its great theme of Jesus Christ's self-sacrificing love for humanity on the cross.

Did Christianity destroy eros, as its opponents claim? Benedict acknowledges that there have been distorted Christian tendencies opposed to the body. But he says it's also true that the modern emphasis on eros without Christian agape makes love "purely biological," debases the body and turns sex into a "commodity."

Evidence for that abounds.

By contrast, authentic love involves a total discovery of the beloved which is no longer self-seeking and is exclusive and lifelong because "love looks to the eternal. . . . Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage," Benedict writes. Marriage is "based on exclusive and definitive love." This love has a distinct erotic aspect because that's how God created us.

Commentators said Benedict's encyclical provided a warm image to the man who was formerly the church's hardline enforcer of doctrine and morals. However, the encyclical's positive tone carries with it an

implicit message of discipline, since its vision excludes divorce and remarriage, adultery, promiscuity and homosexual relationships.

America's pro-gay National Religious Leadership Roundtable quickly complained about this while dissident theologian Hans Kung lamented the plight of remarried Catholics. Others criticized the English translator's insistence on using the generic "man," a sometimes confusing choice for passages about couples.

In a second section, the encyclical addresses love as expressed by the church through its charities and other public involvements.

To the pope, loving works of charity are as essential to the church as prayer and the sacraments. Here, like predecessor John Paul, he is a vehement critic of Marxism. That declining ideology once tried to eradicate Christianity and claimed that believers' loving deeds merely diverted the poor from realizing their plight and thereby helped oppressors.

Here, Benedict offers a succinct philosophy of church and state. No friend of totalitarianism, he says the church should also be limited and leave governing to the secular state. Yet he also insists that the church has the right and duty to influence government, not for partisan political purposes but to speak for justice.

Along the way, Benedict says that the love theme is timely "in a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence." But he discreetly avoids casting any verbal stones at radicalized versions of Islam.

(Historical note: Originally, St. Valentine's Day had nothing to do with romance but honored Christian martyrs with that name who were executed by pagan Rome.)



LOSING AN ALLY

Gay leaders mourn the death of Coretta Scott King, mull the future of the King legacy for GLBT civil rights

By Will O'Bryan
Feb 16, 2006

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., assassinated nearly 40 years ago, is a global icon for civil rights and social justice. In the years since his death, America has evolved from a place where King fought against the establishment, to a nation that officially recognizes his contributions with a federal holiday in his honor.

While the modern, American GLBT civil-rights movement had barely begun at the time of King's death in 1968, that has not stopped debate on where the figure most synonymous with human rights in America might stand on the issue. His wife, Coretta Scott King, offered possibly the best-informed opinion.

"I still hear people say that I should not be talking about the rights of lesbian and gay people and I should stick to the issue of racial justice," Mrs. King said in a 1998 speech, Reuters reported. "But I hasten to remind them that Martin Luther King Jr. said 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.'... I appeal to everyone who believes in Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream to make room at the table of brother- and sisterhood for lesbian and gay people."

With the Jan. 30 death of Mrs. King, the GLBT community has lost one of its most esteemed allies, leaving open the question of the King legacy, as evidenced by her Feb. 7 funeral service at the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta. Her funeral drew a large crowd -- including four U.S. presidents -- to the church in which her daughter, Rev. Bernice King, is an elder. The church has a reputation for being hostile to gay civil-rights issues, as does Bernice King. Her cousin, Rev. Alveda King, has also been outspoken, insisting Martin Luther King Jr. would not have supported same-sex marriage. The choice of the church was enough to keep Julian Bond, chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), from attending. *The Cavalier Daily*, independent newspaper of the University of Virginia, where Bond is a history professor, reported that Bond sent an e-mail to one student explaining why he chose not to attend:

"Mrs. King was a strong supporter of gay and lesbian rights," he wrote, in part. "The pastor of the church [Bishop Eddie Long] where she was funeralized led an anti-gay march through Atlanta -- sadly, Mrs. King's youngest daughter, an elder in his church, accompanied him. We cannot know what Mrs. King's wishes were for a funeral -- she probably had no choice about church or minister -- but I did have a choice -- and while I have an abiding respect for my former neighbor and friend, I chose not to be in that church."

Three leaders of the GLBT civil-rights movement were in attendance, however: Matt Foreman, of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force; H. Alexander Robinson of the National Black Justice Coalition; and Joe Solmonese of the Human Rights Campaign -- all heads of their respective organizations.

"I had deep reservations, but I would've gone anywhere to be at her funeral," says Foreman. "She was so important to gay people. She was such a friend and such an ally when there was nothing in it for her. I would've gone anywhere."

Solmonese points out that there may have been practical concerns in choosing the venue, as New Birth could accommodate a much larger audience than Mrs. King's own Ebenezer Baptist Church, where a smaller service was held Feb. 6.

Robinson says that the choice of New Birth was actually a fitting testament to Mrs. King's ability to bridge communities. "It was prophetic that a woman who lived her life dedicated to her husband's vision of an inclusive society would in death bring together a group of people who have such diverse opinions and ideologies," he says. "It spoke to who she was."

Beyond the venue, the funeral service caused controversy in that some speakers touched on issues of social justice and government oppression, that were perceived by some to inappropriately inject politics into the funeral service. Rev. Joseph Lowery, former president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, cited Mrs. King's anti-war sentiments, saying, "Coretta...knew there were no weapons of mass destruction over there, but there were weapons of misdirection right down here." Carter pointed to the victims of Hurricane Katrina, as well as "secret government wiretapping," employed against the King family in years past -- and seen by some as a jab at the current administration's questionable use of domestic surveillance.

Robinson says he found the remarks perfectly appropriate for the occasion. "Whose funeral was it?" he asks. "It was the funeral of a woman who had dedicated her life to social justice. I believe [the remarks] were very consistent with the life she led. The protest of 'politicization' came from people who disagreed with the social-justice message. The messages of justice, non-violent resistance, were all messages she put forth in her life."

Foreman and Solmonese agree.

"I don't think [the remarks] were inappropriate at all," says Solmonese. "And I don't think the speakers were intentionally taking shots at the president. They were speaking to Coretta Scott King's life work. If that made George Bush uncomfortable, that's George Bush's problem."

Adds Foreman: "It was totally in keeping with her spirit. If there was anything inappropriate, it was that President Bush -- who has done everything possible to destroy the King legacy -- was there and speaking."

What may be of greater concern than who said what at Mrs. King's funeral service, is who will claim to speak for Martin Luther King Jr. in the future. Differing voices are filling the void. While Bernice King is joined by her cousin, Alveda King, in staking claim to a King legacy hostile to gay people, the family's elder daughter, Yolanda King, has been supportive of gay equality. Martin Luther King III has said his father would likely have been a supporter of GLBT equality.

Regardless of whose voices will become the King legacy of the future, there is no question that the gay community has lost an irreplaceable ally.

"She was a huge ally," says Solmonese. "She lent her name to the cause, testified before Congress on ENDA (Employment Non-Discrimination Act), appeared at events. I hope that her death will lead to a rededication and a re-focusing on her and Dr. King's lives. That's the message I took from her funeral."

Says Foreman: "She was one of those people that when you were in her presence, you knew that you were with someone who was -- I'm a little hesitant to use this word -- holy. She just radiated intense integrity, goodness and determination. I think we've lost the best straight ally we've ever had, because she was able to speak with such moral authority on our behalf. Of course we're going to go on. Part of life is death. We were incredibly fortunate to have her for the decades we did."

Robinson also strikes an optimistic chord.

"Certainly not having her presence, not having her around as an advocate, is a great loss. But her message is not lost," he concludes. "She lived her life in a way that we're able to draw from her example and continue to achieve her vision. I feel that she is very much present. We certainly will miss her being an active advocate, but we can draw strength from her contributions, and her record of integrity and consistency. In her passing, we reflect even more on what she stood for."

Good As You

Gay
Lesbian
Straight
Bi
Trans

The 'blood' can be on your hands – just not ours

Posted Feb. 16, 2006

So two weeks ago, Matt Foreman of the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce issued an emotional statement regarding the tragic attack on a Massachusetts gay bar. In said statement, Foreman made the assertion, "We have witnessed seven years of vicious anti-LGBT organizing in Massachusetts — and endured the hate-filled rantings of Brian Camenker of the Article 8 Alliance and Parents Rights Coalition and Ed Pawlick of MassNews. The blood spilled this morning is on their hands."

Now, those on the anti-gay team DID NOT like this one bit. Article 8's Camenker responded to the charge by saying, "It's now becoming clear that homosexual activist groups intend to use this incident as a springboard for a vicious and cowardly series of attacks on anyone who publicly criticizes the homosexual movement – similar to what happened after the Matthew Shepard incident." They were just appalled that Foreman would make such a "harsh" statement regarding what he sees as the repercussions of his oppositions' efforts. In fact, the folks at Article 8/MassResistance even had our buddy Robert Knight on their radio show to discuss the "lack of audacity" Mr. Foreman displayed in suggesting that the "blood" of an anti-gay hate crime might be "on the hands" of those who dedicate their lives to stigmatizing homosexuals:

=== 3. MassResistance Radio interviews Robert Knight on the propaganda techniques by the gay movement. ===

This is one of the best descriptions of "what's happening around you" that we've heard. In this excellent interview, Robert Knight, of the Culture and Family Institute, discusses the propaganda techniques used by the homosexual movement, and how they attempt to intimidate and demonize those who disagree with them, particularly in relation to the recent disgusting statement by a national gay leader saying we "have blood on our hands."

So they've made themselves clear -- the whole "blood is on hands" idiom is a finger-pointing literary device that these folks simply detest. They just feel it to be out of line, right?

Well, for others, that is; take a look at this. In what they describe as...

=== 1. The most powerful article on the homosexual "lifestyle" that we've seen in a long time. ===

...the Article 8/Mass Resistance folks link to a lengthy article from the orthodox Catholic news source *The New Oxford Review*, in which writer Randall G. Lee takes considerable liberties in using a gay bookstore he used to visit in Austin, TX as a metaphor for the entire gay rights movement and homosexual "lifestyle" (a movement Lee calls "rotten to the core" and a life he refers to as "the homosexual insane asylum"). Lee tells of his own time as a homosexual and how he once sought the guidance of John McNeill, the author of *The Church and the Homosexual* who in 1988 was expelled from the Jesuits for refusing to stop preaching that homosexuality can be practiced in accordance with church teachings. Though once encouraged by McNeill's work, Lee concludes of his writings:

And he knew perfectly well that if he were honest about his real aims, there would be no Dignity, there would be no gay Christian movement, at least not one with a snowball's chance in Hell of succeeding. That would be like getting rid of the books and letting the casual window-shoppers see the porn. And we can't have that now, can we? In other words, the ex-Fr. McNeill is a bad priest and a con man. And given the often lethal consequences of engaging in homosexual sex, a con man with blood on his hands.

WAIT -- what, what, what? How dare they praise an article that claims "blood" is on the hands of one of our guys?!? We're gonna...what I mean is...heads are gonna...someone's gonna pay...AAAHH!

Actually, we're not the least but offended, as Mr. Lee's article is a ridiculously harsh, propagandistic, mean-spirited, stereotypical view of a homosexual life that is simply not what we, as actual homosexuals, know to be the prevailing truth. But we do wanna point out how easily these folks can jump on any little thing -- even getting *WorldNetDaily* to write an entire piece revolving around their reaction to said little thing -- yet not even flinch when the exact same claim is used by one of their peeps to attack us. It may seem small, but the whole idea behind it just speaks volumes.



Domestic Partners Bill – Quashed In Court

By Andy Humm

February 2006

New York's highest court handed Mayor Michael Bloomberg a Valentine on February 14 - and took it away from domestic partners - ruling four to three that the mayor was within his rights not to enforce the City Council's Equal Benefits Law.

The ruling by the Court of Appeals is a setback not just for people in such partnerships, but for the New York City Council's ability to use the power of the purse for social justice. What's more, it may significantly limit the council's right to pass laws that the mayor contends run afoul of state and federal laws.

Domestic partners, gay and straight, have been able to register with the city since 1991, and employees of the city government have been entitled to benefits for their domestic partners since Mayor David Dinkins settled a court case in 1993. While many private companies provide domestic partner benefits to their workers as a way to be fair and competitive, they are not required to do so under city law.

The City Council tried to broaden the number of private firms providing such benefits by passing Councilmember Christine Quinn's Equal Benefits Law in 2004, overriding a veto by Mayor Bloomberg to enact it. The law requires contractors who do more than \$100,000 worth of business with the city to treat the domestic partners of employees the same as spouses in the provision of benefits.

The mayor challenged the validity of the law and refused to enforce it. While city contracts are full of requirements on everything from paying a living wage (a bill he signed) to complying with the city's human rights law, Bloomberg has said repeatedly that on principle and under the law, the procurement process should not be used to "advance social causes." Last June, he even went so far as to say that the city should not have used it to fight apartheid in South Africa.

Bloomberg has also criticized the practice of using the city's shareholder power to advance social causes, a leading activity of City Comptroller William Thompson. The mayor has nevertheless not stopped his Finance Commissioner, Martha Stark, from continuing to collaborate with Thompson on these shareholder resolutions in her capacity as head of the City Employees' Retirement System and the Teachers' Retirement System.

In October 2004, Matt Foreman, director of the National Lesbian and Gay Task Force, who once called the Equal Benefits Law the most important piece of gay legislation in the state, resigned his position on the City Human Rights Commission to protest Bloomberg's obstruction of the law. Late last year, Foreman returned to the commission at the mayor's request.

The Court of Appeals majority decision said, "Where a local law seems to conflict with a state or federal one, the mayor's obligation is to obey the latter, as the mayor has done here." The city's Corporation Counsel had argued that the Equal Benefits Law violated the state Municipal Home Rule Law and federal insurance laws.

Stephen Holley, the City Council's attorney, told the AP, "I find it remarkable that the mayor can ignore a law passed over his veto. It's a close call we lost. It's unfortunate."

Alan Van Capelle, director of the Empire State Pride Agenda, the gay lobby, said, "New York City is underwriting discrimination. [The] ruling does not say that this practice is not happening or render any opinion about whether it is right or wrong. It just says the Equal Benefits Bill is not the mechanism to correct it."

Christine Quinn, now the Speaker of the City Council, told the *New York Times*, "What this says is if the mayor disregards our law, I have to sue first..." She has vowed to revive the law both through legislative action in Albany and asking the court for a re-hearing of the case. Similar laws in other localities from San Francisco to Portland, Maine have been upheld in whole or in part by state and federal courts. She called the ruling of New York's court "disappointing and flawed."

She has said in the past that she will also look into compelling the mayor to enforce the Dignity in All Schools Act, an anti-bullying law that he has termed "illegal" and "silly."

The fight over domestic partner rights would be rendered moot for the most part if lesbian and gay couples had the right to marry. Bloomberg has been successful in stopping that from taking place in the city, getting the Appellate Division to overturn in December a lower court ruling that he had to open marriage to same-sex couples. The case is now being appealed by Lambda Legal Defense to the Court of Appeals and Bloomberg has said--perversely in light of the resources he has expended fighting it--that he "hopes" he loses the constitutional arguments before the high court.

Andy Humm, a former member of the City Commission on Human Rights, has been in charge of the civil rights topic page since its inception in 2001. He is co-host of the weekly "Gay USA" on Manhattan Neighborhood Network (34 on Time-Warner; 107 on RCN) on Thursdays at 11 PM.