Maybe This Time

June 30, 2015 By Aundaray Guess

As I write this blog post, America is still celebrating the rights of same-sex couples to marry. Of course not everyone is celebrating. Surprisingly, along with conservatives and individuals who have opposition based on their illogical religious beliefs, there's another small group of dissenters. A small rising group of LGBTQ community members who recognize the fight for marriage has distracted from issues such as rights for the trans community, the continuing racial divide in the gay community and most importantly, the impact of HIV/AIDS which has lost its significance. It's not as if members within the gay community don't feel same-sex marriage shouldn't be celebrated but asking- is it our time again? With this battle won is this the time for HIV/AIDS to come back to the fore front? Is this the moment when we look to see what needs to be addressed and maybe this time, using the same energy and efforts to pass gay marriage, do the same to end or reduce HIV/AIDS?

For myself I celebrate the notion that people can get married but also recognize it's not high in what I consider important. I say this as a gay black man living with HIV and recognize the many issues that declaration comes with. Gay. Black. Man. Yes the gay part of me joins in the celebration but the black male part of me doesn't see the progress. Not when those in my community, the gay black, are still impacted by this disease. Make no mistake, despite being a gay man I will always be identified as black despite my HIV status. Even if I don't place the 'black' distinctiveness on myself, the minute I walk outside the doors of my home, society has placed this identity on me and treats me accordingly. So understand that this victory is bittersweet when HIV continues to heavily impact communities of color and the resounding silence it brings within the LGBTQ community.

As important as the issue of marriage is, even in the early days of fighting for the right to marry, it was evident it was going to shift the focus from HIV/AIDS. One reason being the white gay men, who were the early victims of HIV, were no longer exposed at the same rate as young gay black men of color. The call for action and the rambunctious protests of groups such as ACT-UP had now turned a different corner. With the shift was the loss of financial support. Funding agencies, whether public or private, once provided support to communities along with resources. These resources addressed the issues of stigma and testing, other factors which contributed to HIV infection. Admittedly there were some abuse in the funding system as some agencies were not accountable for monies given, but it was more reckless to throw the baby out with the bath water as crucial services were either cut or defunded.

One unintentional ally was the media, as it spread the news of how HIV was affecting people's

lives. Past the sensationalism coverage were also the stories of people who placed a human face on the disease. Across the country we were able to see that HIV was not a gay man disease, but the impact it had on women, children and those who identified as straight. The press helped to make HIV relevant and kept it on the radar of America's conscious- even if one thought they were not affected.

The war for the right to marry took away the warriors and left people living with HIV, alone on the battlefield. They were stripped of their armor and weapons and left to fend for themselves. LGBT organizations which provided the call to battle left their post for a new dawn. A non-concern rose among the medical ranks as they now saw the disease as a life long illness and not the death sentence it once was. In their absence there was now a single pill which was to be the salvation for those either infected or as a PReP for others.

So with the recent victory of gay marriage, I believe that I and others are wondering if maybe this time people will bring the focus back on a community which never left and in fact has grown. That maybe this time, we can bring back our stories and in the telling of them, hear how the lives of those with HIV are affected. And mostly, maybe this time, the financial support which supported many community driven efforts are replenished for both the existing soldiers on the battlefield and the new ones to come.

Maybe this time next year, we have another reason to celebrate as we see the rates of infection are decreasing across the board. And we can start to see victory.

Maybe…….

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