

The audacity of Pride

BY MICHELLE E. BROWN

June is here and Pride is busting out all over. Can you feel it? It's in the air, in our conversations, circled on every calendar – our celebration of our hopes, our dreams and our community.



Despite a couple of speed bumps here in Michigan including failure to pass the long-stalled anti-bullying measure “Matt’s Safe School Law,” Michigan Supreme Court’s 5-2 decision upholding the appeals court ruling that Michigan’s so-called “Marriage Amendment” prohibits public employers from offering domestic partnership benefits and the daunting reality that hate crimes in Michigan more than doubled in 2007 from the previous year’s total, our march for full equality is definitely on the move.

Change is in the air rolling in on tidal waves from both coasts – New York and California – with monumental court decisions recognizing and affirming our right to marry. We have seen media diva, Oprah Winfrey, host several shows on LGBT issues highlighting our love, our fami-

The audacity to say with conviction that, we shall overcome not some day, but this day. The audacity to respond to the long-suffering call, rooted in African American tradition, of “How Long” with an empowered, strengthened and firm resolve “Not long, America. Not Long.”

Pundits have already hinted that the California ruling might again put gay marriage on the front burner and be used as a wedge issue. The specter of the 2008 elections resurrecting the image of gay people getting married as a threat to the “institution” of marriage must be banished once and for all. We must have the audacity to proclaim “Never Again” to being the political scapegoats “Never again!”

The other topic looming as the elephant in the room is race. Should Barack Obama receive the Democratic nomination, which seems pretty inevitable, will the flame of old biases be fanned into a divisive force? Will portrayals like one I was recently told of showing Barack Obama and Kwame Kilpatrick together dressed in Dashikis’ with the caption “You see what happened to Detroit - do you really want a black president” become mainstream? When voter’s pull that curtain in November will they vote for their hopes, their children, the earth, the future or cast a vote based on the fears and biases of their fathers?

I have the audacity to hope that we, the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community, will

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lies, our lives. Bigger-than-life GOP Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has said the effort by anti-gay forces to amend the California Constitution to permanently ban same-sex marriage is “a total waste of time.” While speaking at a Log Cabin Republican convention (LGBT folks identifying with republican values – yes they exist and are part of our community) he vowed that he would fight against any such amendment.

And our very own talk show goddess Ellen DeGeneres, whose show is watched by millions of Americans – LGBT and straight each day, brought the question of marriage equality to presidential hopefuls putting them on record, live and in living color before the American public. Her discourse with John McCain ending with her asking if he would walk her down the aisle brought our love, our rights (and lack of) home to viewers - all viewers, humanizing this injustice, changing hearts and minds, making people think from the heart not from fear.

A full and inclusive ENDA, the end of “Don’t Ask - Don’t Tell,” second parent adoption, and marriage equality have become issues to define true American values of fairness and equality not knee-jerk, hot-button sound bytes to distract voters from the real issues of the economy, the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, globalization, affordable housing, health care and the environment.

This year as we begin celebrating our pride across the country and in our own great state of Michigan, I am filled with more than the “Audacity of Hope” but am emboldened to have the audacity to believe change is finally going to come.

be the ambassadors for change in our society. In celebrating our diversity, nurturing our families and defending the civil rights of all Americans we can and will chart the path for a better, fairer and more just society.

Just for starters, our community will host two public marches that cross the 8 Mile Bridge and raise awareness about the need to value cultural and racial differences. Not just a gay issue, “Building Bridges: Walking Together to Embrace Diversity” – is addressing a scourge on all of Michigan – the Eight Mile divide: white vs. black, haves vs. have nots. Equality isn’t a special right. It’s the only right for all Americans.

In his book “The Audacity of Hope” Barack Obama calls for a new kind of politics. These new politics build on the shared understandings that pull us together as Americans. As we enter this season of LGBT Pride let us come together celebrating and embracing our diversity, our strength, our vision and our role as an integral piece of the fabric of America.

I have gotten a jumpstart, a pride infusion by attending the DC Black Pride, feeling the love of sisters and brothers from across the country in celebration, strolling a gay-friendly city around Dupont Circle seeing a vibrant LGBT community “empowered and poppin’.”

Pride is bursting out all over and is on its way to Michigan. So from June 1 in Ferndale to Hotter than July picnic July 26, in Lansing, from Traverse City, to Grand Rapids and across the state feel the pride, feel the love, feel the power and claim the audacity to act, to create, to change – the audacity of hope in Pride.