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State Power: A Friend We Should Do Without

A recent lawsuit filed by a Baltimore lesbian-feminist against a San Francisco lesbian-feminist, two heterosexual underage sex cases, and the raid on the male escort advertising website Rentboys.com | Homeland Security agents and the NYPD has gotten us thinking about the use of state power to add grievances and enforce moralistic sex codes. It's our belief that sexual minority peoples and commu extremely suspicious of state power.

In August, Baltimore lesbian-feminist Cathy Brennan filed suit against San Francisco lesbian-femir Stevenson and a company that owns a website geared to lesbian and bisexual women, alleging defar Article in [Baltimore OUTloud, September 4, 2015](#) issue.) Brennan is a prominent and controversial who opposes gender-identity protections that she fears come at the expense of women and girls. She lawsuit that Stevenson and the website criticized her positions on gender issues in a defamatory way seeking at least \$70,000 in damages and an injunction. Stevenson and the website denied the allegat

Also in August, the newspapers ran two stories of underage sex by high-profile people, one national Jared Fogle of Indiana, longtime spokesperson for the Subway sandwich shop chain, is expected to] possessing child pornography and crossing state lines to pay for sex with at least two underage 16- a girls. Locally, Molly Shattuck, a prominent woman and onetime Baltimore Ravens cheerleader who a prominent utility company executive, pled guilty to performing oral sex on a 15-year-old youth w school classmate of her son. And on August 25, Federal Homeland Security agents and the NYPD r: Rentboy.com and arrested seven people, including the CEO. Federal prosecutors called the website : promoting illegal prostitution.

While the lawsuit and these criminal cases may appear unrelated, it is precisely their juxtaposition tl case: namely, that government power can be dangerous for LGBT people and our communities. We LGBT people should always be vigilant about how the government uses its power and take care whe intervention.

We at *Baltimore OUTloud* are no stranger to lawsuits intended to settle disputes within our commur been on the receiving and giving end in this regard. In 2003, we were sued by the GLCCB within a v issue. Several years later, we returned the favor and sued the Community Center. At the time, our la Center made sense to us, but in retrospect, we now view it as a misguided distraction from the real b communities.

Men who grew up in the pre-Stonewall 50s, 60s, and even afterward, knew all too well that contacti could be a disaster and to only do that in a life or death emergency. In those days, interactions with t

gay people were almost always negative. Although we have gained increased visibility and acceptance over the decades, and there are out police officers and police liaisons, the fundamental nature of police power and we should avoid invoking it and encountering it except in the most extreme circumstances.

Back in those prehistoric times, a 15-year-old boy receiving oral sex from an older woman would be a source of pride, respect, and celebration. Also back then, a teenaged boy having sex with a man – sometimes for money – was, at least in some working-class communities, an accepted rite of passage and something to enjoy. Experiences like this bring harsh penalties, with the youths being seen as abused and victimized. This construct arising in part from the emasculation of boys and the victimization narrative that is the center for state intervention. Everyone must wait for the magic legal age to have sex. How does that work in the face of teen desire? Yes, rape occurs and other coercive sexual relationships happen. However, it should be the difference between sex partners that defines a relationship.

Certainly, in this current age where sex abuse is seen everywhere, where all sex between a teenager and an adult person is labeled pejoratively as “pedophilia,” and where sex-offender registries, civil confinement, and other state-called protection tools of the state proliferate, sexual liberation and sex affirming communities are being crushed. Although the onset of AIDS clearly put an exclamation point on the emergence of a virulently sexually transmitted disease, to the liberation of the late 60s and early 70s, some place the beginning of the backlash to the alliance between the feminist and the right-wing anti-pornography movement churning in the mid-70s. Certainly the state has the advantage of all opportunities to insert itself into matters of private sexual conduct and this oppression is growing. The new buzzwords are *sex trafficking* and *campus sexual assaults*, but it is the same anti-sexual oppression that allows the coercive arm of the state to intrude with devastating consequences.

There is a bright spot in this sad tale, where liberation has been replaced by assimilation, where we are protected by hate-crime laws and we file suit to address private wrongs, and that is the public outcry over the Rentboy.com raid and arrests. We are heartened by the outrage and demonstrations that it has triggered among allied communities and among civil-liberties groups. We had feared that this type of response to sexual oppression was beyond the capacity of the organized movement. How uplifting to see a community response to sexual oppression: something more than the constant drum-roll about marriage equality, military service, and gay families coming from the Human Rights Campaign and the various groups with “Equality” in their name.

The use of the courts to address a dispute among individuals may not appear to be in anyway connected to the collective enforcement by “The People” of the criminal laws with the devastating effects prosecution has on those who are caught up in them. But it is when our communities look unquestionably and uncritically to the courts that we find troubling. We certainly understand that not all laws are bad, that some such as anti-discrimination laws protect us, but we should not look to the government for solutions. Before we go off dancing with the state, we realize that it could be a very bad date indeed!

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