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The Equal Marriage Act: The Division of Love and Catholicism

Like most successful countries, America was formed on the basis of religious practices. Catholicism was the first religion to arrive onto U.S soil, as most of the British Colonists founded their beliefs on the teachings of the bible and the church. It was a priority for the colonists to attend church every Sunday, as well as reading their bible every day. With this being said, the societal issues that plague today's world never once crossed their minds. While religion, specifically Catholicism and Christianity, are still practiced in today's society, it's become more apparent that some people have removed themselves from the church altogether. The country as we know it is divided between traditional and contemporary beliefs, and political issues become tangled in-between them. Love has become a tricky topic at the dinner table. Conversations of LGBTQ people didn't officially begin until the early 1900s, and it was an extremely taboo subject. Despite the rapid evolution of this diverse community, they continue to fight for their rights today. The history of the LGBTQ community in America was overshadowed by extreme religious beliefs and hate, and they fought with blood, sweat, and tears to get the Equal Marriage Act passed in 2015.

LGBTQ history goes far beyond the 1900s, as LGBTQ literature began appearing in the 1860s. Many schools in America teach about Walt Whitman and his works, and many people believe Whitman himself was a closeted homosexual. This hypothesis is based on some of his poems that contain homoerotic descriptions. However, Whitman never addressed his sexual

orientation to his readers, but his poetry titled under “Calamus” depicts men and their attraction to one another. According to a research paper written by Harry Cocks, he explains, “...*Calamus* provided the first modern literary justification and defence of homosexual desire. It was clear, Symonds argued, that ‘those unenviable mortals who are the inheritors of sexual anomalies, will recognise their own emotion in Whitman’s “superb friendship, exalté, previously unknown,” which “waits and has been waiting, latent in all men,” the “something fierce in me, eligible to burst forth,” (Cocks 202.) With the constant speculation of his sexual identity, this sparked the beginning of the LGBTQ community in American society as we know it.

America’s view on homosexuality in the 1940s and 1950s was staying put as traditional values and beliefs swept the nation. This was a crucial time for the LGBTQ community, as one of the largest events in LGBTQ history was only a decade away. The topic of same-sex marriage still wasn’t deemed appropriate. Church services had evolved quite a bit, as priests and religious leaders began engaging their with patrons during mass. For the general population, Sunday mass was a time to connect with God and listen to the teachings of the Gospel. For others, however, this couldn’t be farther from the truth. The Christian faith was not accepting of LGBTQ people at all. This was a silent time for the community, as Rivka Weill explains, “The public perceived homosexuals as Communists because Communism was seen as “godless.” (Weill 6.) America was not afraid to express the amount of distaste they felt towards homosexuality. The church perceived same-sex relationships as a sin, and misconceptions turned into stereotypes “...the years leading from the 20th century to WWII were marked with oppression of homosexuals. Child molesters and homosexuals became interchangeable terms.” (Weill 6). In the streets of America, homosexuals were unsafe. It was a rarity to see someone openly in a same-sex relationship walking about in public. Most public places would likely refuse service to them,

either from their own homophobic beliefs or fear of getting in trouble. In other extreme areas of America, it's possible they could've been murdered. Because of this hate, LGBTQ members had to keep their lives a secret. Weill explains, "During the first half of the 20th century, LGBTQ people were reluctant to organize because it was easier and safer to hide their identity..." (Weill 6). Fortunately, some restaurants and bars acted as sanctuaries for homosexuals, as Marc Stein explains, "...bars, bathhouses, clubs, and restaurants were central institutions in LGBT cultures and communities. Gay bar guides listed thousands of sites where LGBT people could express their genders, enjoy their sexualities, and experience social connections." (Stein 27). However, the people who organized these locations were forced to secrecy. If the general public discovered the whereabouts of these establishments, patrons could fall victim to vicious harassment.

It wasn't until a decade later that one of the biggest events in LGBTQ history took place. The Stonewall Inn was built during the 1930s in New York City, serving as a speakeasy. In 1967, it was rebuilt as a gay bar. At this point in American history, many people felt that it was time for a change, and LGBTQ activists were beginning to make frequent appearances in the media. However, the majority of Americans still possessed traditional values, including the people who worked in the media. "...LGBT activists had criticized mainstream media for biased reporting, complaining about LGBT invisibility and negative visibility in newspapers, magazines, television programs, and radio shows." (Stein 126). No matter what the media had to say, the Stonewall Inn acted as a place for everyone to feel safe, whether they were associated with the LGBTQ community or not. However, on June 28th, 1969, the Stonewall Inn was suddenly raided by police. While the bartenders were being arrested, the police began physically injuring patrons, and soon, a riot broke out. The fight between NYPD and LGBTQ patrons and their allies lasted for roughly five days. After the riot ceased, it was implied by the media that no one was killed,

however many people were severely injured. Although the riots were bloody and vicious, this marked the beginning of a gruesome legal battle between America and the LGBTQ community. The fight for legal same-sex marriage had officially begun.

At this point in American history, the nation was beginning to split, and discussions of same-sex marriage had begun appearing everywhere. The 1970s marked a crucial time for the LGBTQ community, as a small number of people began feeling comfortable enough to come out to their friends and family. Societal views changed as popular artists of the time came out to their fans. Elton John and David Bowie were two of the most influential artists of the 1970s and 1980s. Both musicians came out around the same time, with Bowie in 1972 and John in 1976. For the music industry, publicity ratings were through the roof. The 1970s also marked the beginning of protests for peace. As a result of these movements, everyone was encouraged to form loving bonds with each other and promote equality. Every movement was different, but it's no lie that members of the LGBTQ community were included. Conservative and traditional values, especially involving religion, were questioned beyond belief, and the children of the baby boomers were demanding change. As people began researching other religions, older generations became unhappy. Other movements attempted to combine religion and equality with the LGBTQ community, but unfortunately most of their members couldn't compromise.

Finally, more than forty years later in 2015, President Barack Obama passed the Equal Marriage Act, making same-sex marriage legal in all 50 states. People around the country rejoiced as same-sex couples began planning their lives together without prejudice or discrimination. Jumping to today's America, huge improvements have been made in accommodating and accepting people who identify with the LGBTQ community. Religion in America as a whole has decreased tremendously. According to an article on Time's website

written by Denver Nicks, he explains, “The number of Americans who say they are religiously unaffiliated climbed from 16% in 2007 to 23% in 2014, a trend primarily driven by the widespread shift away from organized religion among younger Americans.” (Nicks.) While Millennials and Gen Z are steering away from religion, the other generation’s feelings about spirituality have only grown stronger. “...those who do identify with a faith report slightly higher levels of religiosity than they have in the past.” (Nicks.) Today, it’s safe to say that the divide between Christianity and the LGBTQ community has never been stronger. However, it’s important to understand that Americans who identify as atheist or agnostic are a minority, but the numbers of people removing themselves from the church are slowly dwindling. However, with higher levels of religiosity comes more extreme beliefs. This has led to many people to keep their sexual identities hidden in fear of their own safety. People believe that the liberties of the LGBTQ community are under threat because of these extreme views. According to a book written by Cody Sanders, he writes, “Hearing anti-LGBTQ messages preached from the pulpit, compounded by the fear of rejection from family and church groups, helped to draw the boundaries between public and private life...” (Sanders 71.) Each state has the right to practice their personal beliefs, and many of them are still anti-LGBTQ.

The Equal Marriage Act, otherwise known as the Marriage Equality Act, was officially passed by congress in 2015. The supreme court had to make an important decision in the hearing of Obergefell v. Hodges, and with four same-sex couples coming to the stand and telling their stories. After a vicious trial, the supreme court voted 5-4 on the legalization of same-sex marriage in all 50 states. LGBTQ people around the country rejoiced. After over a century of fighting, they could finally claim their victory. Gina and Heidi Nortonsmith, a lesbian couple who met in Atlanta, Georgia, had been married for twenty years before the Equal Marriage Act

was passed on June 16th, 2015. Time Magazine wrote an article about the struggles and hardships they had to overcome in order to get married in 2004. Gina says, “We already had our oldest son, and had been working with our lawyer to draw legal papers to show that if something happened to Heidi, as the birth mom, I was the other parent. There was only so much that our lawyer could do for us because we couldn’t get legally married.” (Burga 14.) It’s safe to say that after the act passed, many people in the LGBTQ community gained strength and confidence to come out to their families and friends. Even though some of them were met with anger and rejection, they knew that they were able to find sanctuary with people who truly cared.

Now, almost ten years later, the LGBTQ community is thriving more than ever. Fortunately, the Catholic church and its counterparts have become more welcoming to people of the LGBTQ community. However, the country is still a hateful place filled with horrible selfish people. Anti-LGBTQ communities still exist, especially with religion in mind. Brynn Tennahill, a former Naval aviator, wrote an article about the Family Research Council. The FRC is an Evangelical organization that revolves around Christian values and beliefs. The organization was founded by James Dobson, a member of Donald Trump’s evangelical executive advisory board. The group is commonly known as an anti-LGBTQ community. Tennahill explains their belief system as follows, “...five members of Trump's evangelical executive advisory board, including FRC founder James Dobson, joined 145 other evangelical leaders in signing a statement condemning "homosexual immorality" and "transgenderism" and claiming, among other things, that "adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is [not] consistent with God's holy purposes," and that anyone who "approves" of LGBT people cannot call themselves Christian.” (Tennahill). Other organizations, such as the ADF (Alliance Defending Freedom) want to revert homosexuality back to a crime. Tennahill explains, “SPLC describes the ADF as an anti-LGBT

hate group and a legal advocacy and training organization that "has supported the recriminalization of homosexuality in the U.S. and criminalization abroad; has defended state-sanctioned sterilization of trans people abroad; has linked homosexuality to pedophilia and claims that a 'homosexual agenda' will destroy Christianity and society." (Tennahill.) These organizations claim that what they're fighting for is religious freedom, when in reality, they only want to harm the LGBTQ community and its allies. The aim of both of these organizations is to prevent people in the LGBTQ community from gaining a normal life. Although many people believe that the fight for same-sex rights had ended in 2015, they are unfortunately wrong. No matter what, everyone should have the chance to get married to the person they love the most. Legalization doesn't always equal freedom, because everyone still has their own personal beliefs. For now, the LGBTQ community must continue their fight, but this time, against the homophobia that's planted itself inside the Catholic church.

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