

# Lessons from frederick douglass argumentative essay

Family, Same Sex Marriage



## **Same-Sex Marriage and Discrimination**

Battles over civil rights have been fought for centuries in the United States. Slavery, the vote for women, and equal rights for blacks are just a few examples of civil rights issues that citizens fought for and won. One of the big battles being fought state by state today is the conflict over same-sex marriage. While some states have made same-sex marriage legal, other states have outlawed it. People for and against it provide many reasons why it should or should not be legal. In addition to listening to the reasoning of both sides on the issue of same-sex marriage, it is also useful to consider lessons from history to see what happens when rights are offered to some people but not to others.

As same-sex couples and their supporters work to convince voters and state representatives to grant them the right to marry, others are working against it. People against same-sex marriage have many angles they argue from. For example, Richard McDonough says that same sex-marriage is not a civil or equal rights issue because “heterosexuals and homosexuals have the exact same right to marry . . . one other adult of the opposite sex” (Williams 590). Others believe that if a couple’s relationship has no possibility of leading to pregnancy and childbirth, it is not a marriage (Skillen 2). Some people believe that civil unions for homosexuals are okay, but not marriage, even though people in civil unions do not receive the same benefits as married couples. As of the writing of this paper, 31 states have made constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage (“Should Gay Marriage Be Legal?”).

Prejudice against homosexuals is behind many of these arguments and constitutional bans. On the extreme end of this prejudice are people who have killed homosexuals just because they are homosexual. For example, Bill Jack Gaither was murdered in 1999 by Steve Mullens and Charles Butler, two people he knew in his hometown of Sylacauga, Alabama (Malis). The words of one of the killers, Mullins, are frightening as he uses the Bible to justify the murder he committed. He says, " God forgives everything, If you ask, you shall receive. And I asked for forgiveness, and that's what I got. I repented. [Bill Gaither is] in hell because he's a homosexual and it tells you in the New Testament that that's wrong" (Malis). Most people do not act in the extreme way that Gaither's killers did, but still use the Bible as an example of why same-sex marriage or being homosexual is wrong. More recently, a North Carolina pastor came to national attention for suggesting fencing in all gays and lesbians within a 100-150 mile fence, saying, " And have that fence electrified 'til they can't get out . . . Feed 'em. And you know what, in a few years, they'll die out. Do you know why? They can't reproduce" (Lynch). Though most clergy do not resort to such extreme ideas either, the fact that a person like a pastor who is seen as a leader by his community is encouraging these things is very disturbing.

This appears to paint a very dark picture not only for same-sex marriage, but also for homosexuals in general. However, as of June 7, 2012, eight states and the District of Columbia have legalized same-sex marriage (" Should Gay Marriage"). The U. S. Armed Forces officially repealed the " Don't Ask Don't Tell" (DADT) law on September 20, 2011, allowing gays and lesbians to serve

openly in the military (Public Law No. 111-321). Support by Americans for same-sex marriage has never been higher. According to an ABC News research poll, “ Overall, 53 percent of Americans say gay marriage should be legal, steady the past year but up from 36 percent in just 2006” (Ergun). The evidence shows that gay rights issues, including same-sex marriage, receive an increasing amount of support from Americans.

The increasing number of Americans supporting gay-rights issues including same-sex marriage is important to American society as a whole. America is a nation founded on promoting freedom for people of all races, religions, genders, cultural backgrounds, ages, and so forth. America’s variety of religious and other groups do not always agree on beliefs, practices, and such, yet still live side by side. As a nation, the Founding Fathers created America to be a place where people of many different backgrounds and beliefs can feel free to live, work, and love as they please as long as it does not harm the constitutional rights of others. Now that support for same-sex marriage is in the majority and even the U. S. Armed Forces allow homosexuals to serve their country openly, it appears to be the time to allow same-sex marriage.

Some people may question why same-sex marriage should be legalized when civil unions could serve the same purpose. The problem is, benefits that people receive through marriage are much greater than those they receive under federal civil union laws. For example, civil unions do not include “ Social Security survivor benefits, hospital visitation rights, tax-free inheritance benefits, spousal immigration rights, durable power of attorney

rights when a partner is in terminal medical condition, and protection against mutual incrimination that derives from the Fifth Amendment” (Williams 594).

This means that even though a same-sex couple can join the U. S. Armed Forces where they may give their lives for America, with only a civil union they have none of the rights a married couple would have. If injured, they would not be permitted visitation rights, and so forth. It seems unjust that homosexual people who can now openly serve their country and give their lives for it cannot be granted the right to marry like any other loving couple.

Lessons from the past, like Frederick Douglass’s biographical piece, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, show some of the bad things that can happen when a group is dehumanized and not given the same rights as other groups. Marriage was not permitted for slaves. As a result, “ A single word from the white men was enough—against all our wishes, prayers, and entreaties—to sunder forever the dearest friends, dearest kindred, and strongest ties known to human beings” (Douglass 72). By forbidding family ties such as marriage, the slaveholders basically eliminated the idea that a family could exist at all for their slaves. There was no way to tie a family together, for a wife to stay with a husband, or even for a child to stay with a mother. It is easy to imagine a situation that could be similar for same-sex couples. For example, imagine Jane and Mary are a same-sex couple living in a state where same-sex marriage is constitutionally banned. Both are 33 years old and wish to marry, but their state does not allow it. Jane is in a terrible car accident, and Mary rushes to the hospital to see her. Against all her wishes, prayers, and entreaties, the

hospital staff does not allow Mary to see Jane because she is not a family member. Even Jane's mother asks the staff to let Mary see Jane, but they stick firmly to their policy of no non-family members allowed. Jane has adopted a little girl, but upon Jane's death, Mary is not allowed to adopt the child, who is sent to a foster home. Just like in Douglass's time, by not allowing a group of people to marry, families are split apart in unnecessary, traumatic, and terrible ways.

A big problem with allowing each state to create its own laws concerning same-sex marriage is that if a same-sex married couple moves to a different state where same-sex marriage is not recognized, they lose their rights. For example, " an out-of-state couple who goes to Massachusetts to marry, or a couple who lives in-state and then moves away, can't divorce in Massachusetts because they'd have to be a resident for at least a year. And if the couple's home state doesn't recognize gay marriage, they can't divorce there, either" (Smith). Custody, property, and other issues become unsolvable. Like in Douglass's time, differences in rules between the states lead to problems. Some states allowed slavery, others abolished it completely, while others did not allow slavery but did allow capture and return of slaves to former masters. While same-sex couples may not live in the constant fear of capture and enslavement that Douglass did, there is still a lot for them to fear as far as their families are concerned. For example, a same-sex couple may originally live in a state where their marriage is legal, but because of the recession, they must move to a state where same-sex marriage is banned just to have a job. The possibility then becomes strong

that their partner or any children they have may not be able to receive benefits that any ordinary married couple takes for granted.

America needs to recognize same-sex couples as a group that is being discriminated against. As a nation founded on multicultural, religious, and other equalities, there is no reason a same-sex couple should not be allowed to marry, because they are not taking away any rights from other people. Lessons from the past have taught the nation that inequality is bad for the nation and its families. Until all of the states can consistently offer same-sex marriage and the benefits it offers to these couples, their rights are being discriminated against.

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