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Crane: Exclusion and fear must give way

By Cindy Crane

Knowing history matters. It helps us to recognize how points of discrimination intersect and move us to take inventory of today 's society.

But whose history is taught in schools? That question comes to mind when reflecting on the 15th anniversary of the largest gay rights march in history.

On April 25, 1993, more than 1 million people marched on Washington to bring attention to cultural and legal biases against lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

Some journalists wanted to compare the 1993 march on Washington to the famous 1963 Civil Rights march led by Martin Luther King Jr. I don 't easily embrace these analogies because each group 's struggle against invisibility is unique.

However, I do think of Bayard Rustin, the African American civil rights leader who was a brilliant organizer and main architect of the 1963 march on Washington. Rustin also happened to be gay.

King had been warned that Rustin 's sexual orientation would be exposed and used against the civil rights movement. In the background, Rustin struggled with his sexual orientation but eventually concluded that sexual minority people had to demand rights in the same way that African Americans did.

Taking inventory today, what would we add to a major lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) march and the events surrounding it? Certainly we 'd celebrate the T in LGBT. We 'd address those awful amendments that ban same sex marriage haunting so many of our state constitutions.

We 'd remember Lawrence King, the 15-year-old gay teenager murdered by another student in Oxnard, Calif., and others targeted for hate crimes. I very much hope we 'd recognize people from other countries in committed same sex relationships with U.S. citizens who cannot gain residency without the option for legal marriage.

More than holding another march, however, I 'd like to see aspects of LGBT history and current events included in school curriculum -- and with support from school administrators.

Many school professionals already discuss LGBT issues in the classroom to address anti-gay bullying and some to uplift the history of sexual minority people. However, our staff members at Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools are aware of many teachers ' reticence to even mention the word "gay " in their classrooms because of likely repercussions from parents and lack of support from within their schools.

Students are left with no lessons about LGBT people: lessons in invisibility.

I wonder if in the future, exclusion and fear will give way to new speech. The history of one group will be recognized as belonging to us all. Students will learn about groundbreaking marches as being a part of everyone 's history.

LGBT and straight students, students of color and white students -- all will study the history of Bayard Rustin and claim, "He was one of our own. "

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