

NGLTF Has a Dream, Too

What you didn't see or hear about in the mainstream coverage of the 40th anniversary of the historic 1963 March on Washington by African American civil rights supporters is that queers were there, too.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force co-sponsored the march, and director Matt Foreman spoke from the podium. More than 1500 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (lgbt) people participated in the commemoration, which drew an estimated crowd of 15,000. A "We Walk With You" banner and 100-foot long rainbow pride flag led the LGBT contingent from the northeast corner of the Reflecting Pool to the Bayard Rustin Rally near the Lincoln Memorial. Rustin was instrumental in the planning of the original march, but stayed in the background because of concerns that his homosexuality would discredit the civil rights movement.

Lgbt issues were addressed in multi-issue teach-ins. Unity with gay people and the entire lgbt community was called for by many speakers from the Lincoln Memorial Rally podium itself, starting with Martin Luther King,



National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman along with Mandy Carter and wife and life partner of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Coretta Scott King, at the 40th Anniversary of the 1963 Civil Rights March on Washington in August. Mrs. King has been an outspoken advocate for gay and lesbian rights.

III, who said, "... homophobia is hate and hate has no place in the beloved community." Congressman John Lewis, the last surviving speaker from the 1963 rally, said, "... gays and straights must pull together for the common good." At least three of the Anniversary Rally speakers (including the Task Force's Matt Foreman and Southerners on New Ground's

Mandy Carter) were openly gay or lesbian.

"This is the first time ever that our community has been invited to participate in the March and be represented at the rally," said Foreman. "I was honored to walk with my African American brothers and sisters in this inclusive 40th anniversary of our nation's historic civil rights March on Washington, and I am proud of the lgbt community who came together from across the country to support it."

"As a Black woman and a lesbian, I think it's important to not only emphasize equal civil rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people as a whole, but specifically for lgbt people of color as well," said Mandy Carter, Executive Director of Southerners on New Ground (SONG). "It's unfortunate that Bayard Rustin couldn't bring all of his identities to the table in his fight for civil rights. We are not only proud to be a part of this 40th Anniversary March, but we are extremely proud to be honoring Bayard Rustin for his work from decades ago."

In his speech, Foreman acknowledged, "There are differences between parts of the beloved community." But, he continued,

"what we agree on far outweighs our differences."

"We all agree that all discrimination is wrong, that everyone deserves full equality under the law. We agree that hate violence still stains America. We agree that centuries of legal racial oppression can only be overcome through forceful and affirmative action."

Foreman then issued a call to action against the current federal administration and the Republican-dominated Congress, saying that "the hard-won progress achieved over the last 40 years in civil rights and economic justice is in mortal danger." He identified the right wing's tactics in gaining power as knowing "how to set aside their differences," turning out to vote, and "repeatedly and successfully driv[ing] wedges into the heart of America and into our beloved community."

"And mark my words, they are already geared up to make gay people and our relationships the Willie Hortons of the 2004 election cycle," Foreman predicted. "This time, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people will be their chosen prey to distract the nation from the mess they've created at home and abroad. ▼"

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