

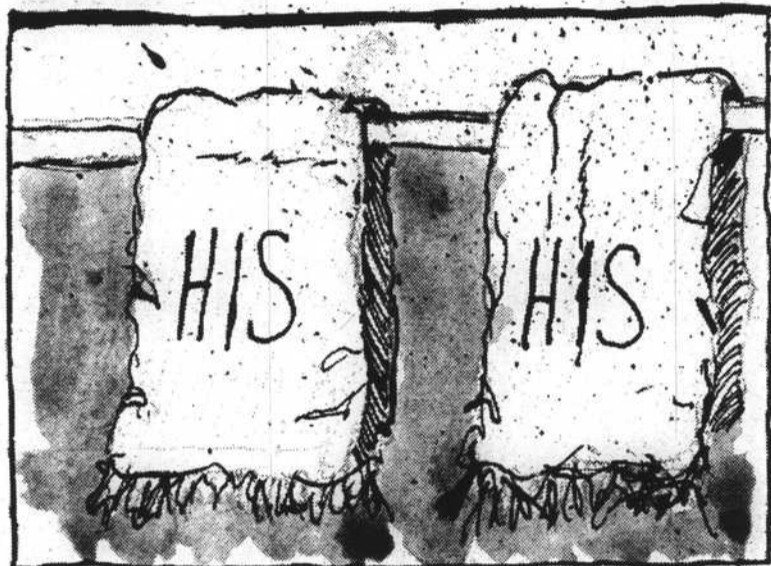
OPINION

Tuesday, April 9, 1996

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Daily
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Legally binding

'Domestic partners' deserve equal benefits

Marriage is an age-old tradition meaning the legally-binding union of a man and a woman.

Homosexuality is also an age-old tradition. But neither homosexuality nor homosexual, or same-sex, marriages have been accepted in our society.

Homosexuality is becoming more accepted, though, and legalizing same-sex marriages is being discussed in some areas of the country.

Hawaii is seriously looking at approving same-sex marriages. And in January, San Francisco officials gave gay couples in that city the right to a symbolic wedding ceremony, observing the right some gay San Francisco couples have had since 1991 as domestic partners.

But that's San Francisco. San Francisco has always been at the forefront of gay rights.

What about Nebraska?

Sen. Eric Chambers of Omaha introduced a bill this year in the Nebraska Legislature to make same-sex marriages legal. The bill is unlikely to be seriously considered, however. In addition, South Dakota has banned same-sex marriages and Colorado may do the same.

So what can be done to help same-sex couples gain the rights they deserve?

Some faculty members right here at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln have a plan. In a narrow vote last week, the UNL Academic Senate said it approved of extending benefits to domestic partners, heterosexual or homosexual.

That's an admirable goal, but extending benefits to couples involved in a relationship that is less tangible than a marriage, like a domestic partnership, brings about some problems. Even in San Francisco, where domestic partnerships are recognized, those couples are not afforded the full benefits of marriage.

Marriage involves a legally binding commitment that doesn't exist in a domestic partnership. Couples should be expected to make that kind of strong commitment before receiving benefits. The problem is that our society only allows heterosexual couples to make such a commitment.

That's unfair.

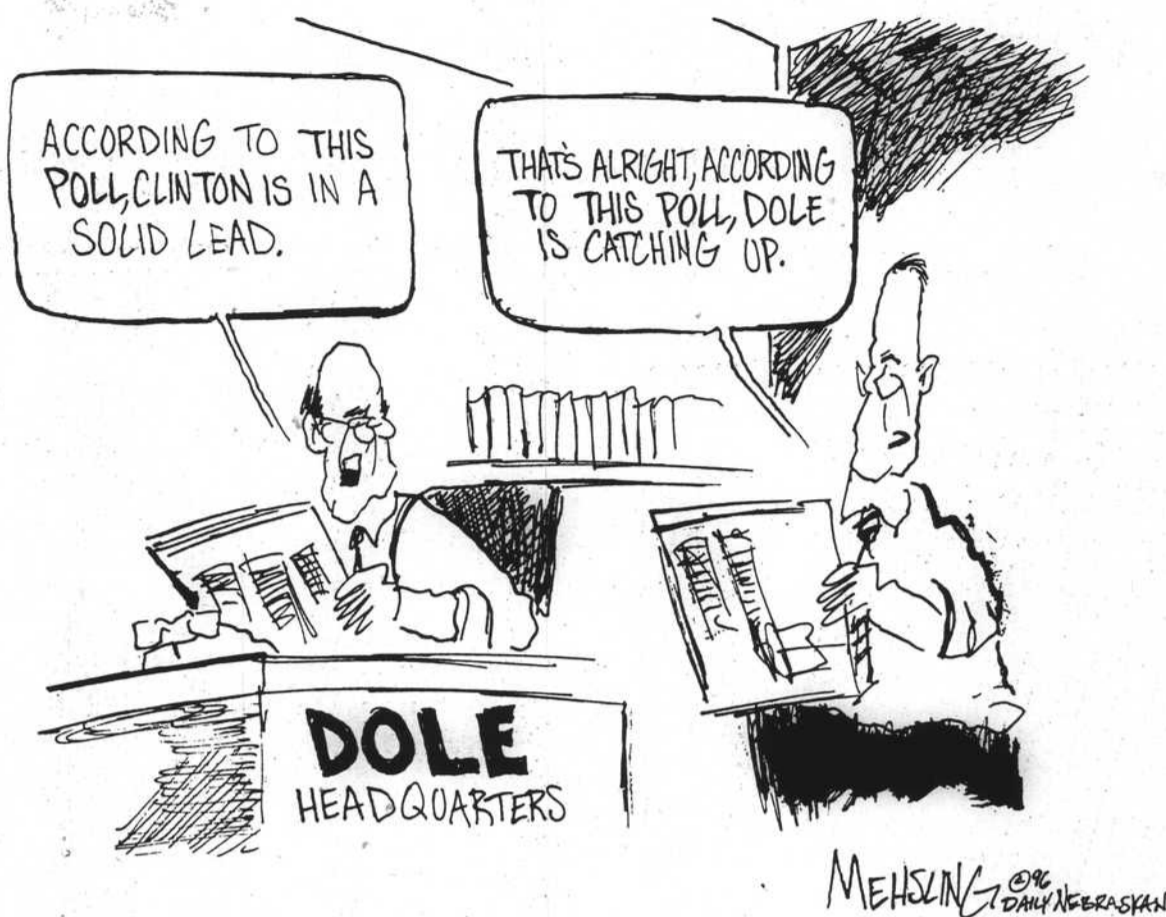
In a society that doesn't accept same-sex marriages, imperfect arrangements like a domestic partnership may be an important transitional step to recognizing the rights that homosexual couples deserve.

Editorial policy

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Deprived

Children suffer from 'forbidden' adoptions

"This whole thing boils down to two things. One, I'm a white man wanting to adopt a black child, and two, they are embarrassed that they dragged their feet." So said Jan Hall to the Washington Times, lifting the lid on a disgraceful example of the institutionalized child abuse afflicting our child care system.

Hall's situation is slightly unusual, but his problem is all too typical. Hall and his wife have temporary custody of two little boys, 16 months old and 4 years old, who were removed from their mother's care because of abuse and neglect. While both children are considered black by the Department of Human Services, Hall is the biological father of one of the boys. He had an extramarital affair with the mother.

When Hall expressed his desire to adopt both children, he ran into a brick wall. It's not that he doesn't qualify as a suitable parent. It's that his skin is the wrong shade.

Throughout America, tens of thousands of black children languish in foster care awaiting suitable adoptive families, and yet, there is an unwritten policy among public agencies to forbid interracial adoptions.

Horror stories abound. In Michigan, an active black toddler was taken from the white parents who wanted to adopt him and given to his 65-year-old grandmother who was on kidney dialysis. Another black baby in Michigan had five foster care placements before his first birthday. By the time he reached the home of the Quinns, he was anemic and suffering from delayed development. Under the Quinns' care, Corey thrived. But when the Wayne County officials learned of the white couple's desire to adopt, they scrambled to find a black home for the child. They removed the boy and put him in a black home that turned out to house a felon, as well as numerous safety



Mona Charen

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violations.

In a Nebraska case, white twins were taken from their black foster parents who wanted to adopt them. One was placed with a white pedophile, and the other with an alcoholic.

Carol Coccia is the president and founder of the National Coalition to End Racism in America's Child Care System. In addition to her own three children, Coccia has helped to raise 47 foster children of all races over 26 years. She understands the skepticism of some blacks about white adoptive families, recalling a white social worker asking her, "Why should we bother about those children?" a generation ago.

But a very great deal has changed in 25 years. Today, the threat to

black babies and children comes not from whites but from blacks who insist upon racial separatism in adoption.

Carol Coccia does not dispute that where all things are equal — stability of the family, finances, suitable living space — race should be a factor in adoption. But there simply are not enough black families to care for all of the black children who desperately need homes. Black children are suffering in unstable and unwholesome foster care situations only because the social service agencies refuse to place them with whites.

Such is the ideological zeal of the black separatists that in Detroit, black babies were being kept in hospitals, at a cost of \$365 per day, for as much as nine months, rather than placed in white foster homes for \$10 a day. And a black single mother on welfare raising four children of her own has a better chance to adopt a black baby than a married white couple.

All parties say that "the best interests of the child" guide their decisions. Black social workers rely on the claim that interracial placements harm the black child's racial identity.

Not so, says Professor Elizabeth Bartholet of Harvard Law School. In a law review article published last spring, she notes that all of the research on such children shows that their racial identity is solid and positive.

Black children are suffering. Far more often than whites, they are placed with fathers over 61, with single parents and with dysfunctional families. A disgraceful double standard prevails. Homes that never would pass muster for a white child are considered suitable for a black.

This is a new racism — and that's an outrage.

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...to the

Daily
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