



## Gay Wedding Cakes and the Media Borg

By Heather Wilhelm - February 28, 2014

A few weeks ago, I visited a Crate & Barrel store with my family. My goal was simple: to return a lamp. The goal of my three kids was twofold: first, to touch everything breakable in sight; and second, to run pell-mell up and down the escalators like a newly liberated troop of loopy, cartoon baboons. Crate & Barrel's goal, as I discovered while I was waiting in line, was a bit more ambitious: They wanted to celebrate diversity.

The store's wedding registry section, which stood right next to the return line—"I wish the stuff was this nice when I got married," the woman in front of me whispered over her shoulder, eyes scanning a slow cooker. "I got a bunch of crap!"—was accented with poster-size photos celebrating the joys of getting hitched.

Images included golden champagne in clinking glasses; artful, subtle flower arrangements; glorious tents propped on velvety green lawns—and, in the largest photo of all, a fetching gay couple, sporting crisp tuxedos, strong jawlines, and stylish, Clooney-esque stubble.

"Hmm, that's interesting," I thought. Then I got back to my life. I returned the lamp as quickly as possible, plucked my kids from the proverbial rafters from which they were swinging, and headed home.

Crate & Barrel, of course, is not alone in celebrating the relatively new phenomenon of gay marriage. In 2012, Target adorned ads for its wedding registry with alternating gay and lesbian couples, using the slogan "Be Yourself, Together." This year, during the Super Bowl, Coke used warm and fuzzy images of same-sex parents. During the opening ceremonies of the Olympics, Chevrolet released 30-second spots celebrating a diverse range of families, including one headed by a gay couple. Their title: "The New Us."

Meanwhile, Jason Collins, the first openly gay player in the NBA—though he's still on just a 10-day contract—found his Brooklyn Nets jersey to be the league's top seller the first day it was released. Not to be outdone, RuPaul, America's most famous drag queen (and the singer of one of my most beloved '90s dance songs, "Supermodel [You Better Work]") rang the closing bell, no doubt fabulously, at NASDAQ this week.

So gay people, at least in the American mainstream media culture, seem to be having a pretty fun year at the popular kids' table. How about some other groups? Just for kicks, I recently entered

“Christians” into my Google News search box. Shazam! We were off to the not-so-fun races. Among the more recent headlines: “White Christians: Please Stop Denying Your Privilege,” (Huffington Post, Feb. 26); “Have Christians Lost the Culture War?” (Fox News, Feb. 21); “Christians Less Generous Than Their Clergy and Everyone Else” (The Guardian, Feb. 24), and finally, from The Atlantic, the question that has obsessed American media all week: “Should Christian Bakers Be Allowed to Refuse Wedding Cakes to Gays?”

The correct answer, in case you missed this week’s collective outrage from small, powerless grassroots entities like NBC, ABC, The New York Times, Mitt Romney, John McCain, American Airlines, Intel, Apple, Marriot, and the National Football League, is a firm, resounding—did I mention collectively outraged?—“NO.”

The frenzy was sparked by Arizona’s proposed SB-1062, an expansion of state law inspired by recent incidents involving florists in Washington state, bakers in Oregon, and photographers in New Mexico who were sued when they refused to participate in gay weddings, which they considered a sin. The bill itself was rather benign, was designed to protect religious liberty, and was in general supported by people who actually read it—including pro-gay-marriage scholars from the Cato Institute and a group of prominent law professors from Harvard, Stanford, and the University of Virginia.

But that wasn’t enough to fight the Borg. In case you’re not a “Star Trek” fan, the Borg, as I understand it, is an alien race that shares a collective conscience, aiming to assimilate those who are “primitive” to them. Their goal: a vast mind-meld. Their slogan: “Resistance is futile.” (As an aside, let me make one thing clear: I am most certainly not a “Star Trek” fan. “Star Trek” is full of sexy aliens, and sexy aliens are creepy.) And while the members of the Borg may not be universally sexy, they certainly share a striking resemblance to our growing national media-industrial complex.

The Arizona bill was labeled “anti-gay” (CNN, New York Times, ABC, NBC), “a homophobic stunt,” (Reason), based on “hate” and “stereotypes” (Judge Andrew Napolitano of Fox News) and the equivalent of “homosexual Jim Crow laws” (columnist Kirsten Powers in USA Today). This shunning was accompanied by direct and intense economic pressure. The National Football League, for instance, intimated that it might just move the 2015 Super Bowl out of Glendale. Other corporate giants, including AT&T, joined the chorus. And so, on Wednesday, Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer vetoed the bill.

The Borg, all-powerful, had spoken.

A growing number of Americans, according to surveys, believe gay marriage is OK. But in a free country, with a First Amendment, it shouldn’t be mind-boggling that you can also accept that Christians have the right to believe that gay marriage is a sin. This, however, would make you different from the Borg. It’s quite telling that the defenders of SB-1062 made their case by actually focusing on the details of the measure, and its meaning for religious liberty. Opponents of the bill tended to feverishly focus on faith: on what makes for “real” Christianity, on endless speculation as to whether Jesus would have baked a cake for a gay wedding, and who exactly counts as a homophobic scoundrel.

The Borg's problem, in other words, wasn't with the bill. It was with the idea that someone can get away with—and even worse, be protected by the state for—thinking gay marriage is wrong. It's a problem with freedom of thought, and whether you're for or against gay marriage, this should bother you at least a little bit. At least, that is, if you're thinking for yourself.

What will become of the next small business owner pressured into acting against their conscience? We'll see. But let's be clear: In this case, despite the media's attempt to paint them as latent oppressors, Christians are the little guys. As it just showed in Arizona, the Borg is a force to be reckoned with. Perhaps the question now is this: Is resistance really futile?