

Queering Paradigms 7

“Discourses of damnation, or not quite *liberté égalité fraternité* – debates over civil partnership and gay marriage in Britain and France”

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Although France and Britain brought civil partnership onto their respective statute books in 1999 and 2005 respectively, it was to be another decade before they enacted equal marriage. To get there, both initiatives ran a gauntlet of disinformation, negative media reporting, and opposition in parliament and in public in both nations.

What were the key themes and arguments of both camps – the pros and antis – before and after the success which brought equality? This paper will investigate the origins and development of the initiatives to promote civil partnerships and ‘gay marriage’ in both France and Britain, examining both trends as well as themes in promotion and denigration. In the case of France, the concept of *Mariage pour Tous* saw its opposition articulated around the *Manif pour Tous* movement which sought to define and draw to its support an “all” which excluded those who would benefit from President Hollande’s proposal, and which was not afraid to be verbally (and sometimes physically) violent against the pro-marriage camp, also using racist tropes against former *Garde des Sceaux* or justice minister Christiane Taubira. Across the Channel, how could a conservative government which in the past had persecuted members of the LGBT community and legislated against the promotion of homosexuality or pretend family relationships through the infamous Section 28 in 1998, embrace gay marriage some fifteen years later? And how did opponents articulate their opposition? How did British understatement in achieving equality succeed where French taking to the streets in opposition failed?

In examining these themes and their articulations, we shall see how both pros and antis marshalled their forces with greater or lesser degrees of success, and invite reflection on how the tactics leading to these successes might be applied elsewhere.