

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXVII, Number 58, 22 April 1993 — SPECTRUM Take back the nation: queers in D.C.  
[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

## SPECTRUM

### *Take back the nation: queers in D.C.*

**Conor Ryan**

*A short note before I begin:  
Some persons have expressed  
concern about my use of the word  
“queer.” Continue on for an expla-  
nation of my position.*

Only four more days until what I hope will be one of the highlights of not only the past year, but the past 18 years of my life. On Sunday, Apr. 25, an estimated one million gays, lesbians, and bisexuals will gather in our nation's capital to march for equality and liberation.

The 1993 March On Washington (MOW) is looking like the culmination of what may be called the Year of the Queer someday in the future. In the past 12 months there has been a relative deluge of news stories about gays and lesbians, continuing the evolution of homosexuality from a taboo subject to a controversial and very public debate.

Part of this phenomenon can certainly be attributed to the increasing number of outstanding, successful gays and lesbians who are visible now, more than ever. In the past few months, k. d. lang won a Grammy, Tony Kushner's play "Angels in America" won the Pulitzer for drama, and Paul Monette won the National Book Award for "Becoming a Man."

Similarly, gays and lesbians have made large strides in the political arena. Bill Clinton openly courted queer voters like no Presidential candidate had in the past. Just last week, in an unprecedented move, queer leaders were invited to the White House.

Yet, for all the advances we've made in the five years since the 1987 MOW, we seem to be losing ground. It's been too little, too *soon*, with a huge backlash mounting in opposi-

tion to the progress we've made. Sunday's march is coming at a time when our collective anger is coming to a head.

Across the country, the Christian right is sneaking religious fanatics on to school boards, city councils and state congresses. Clinton, who will not be in the city this weekend, for all his promises, has backed down on the military ban and has yet to appoint an AIDS czar. To top it off, the passage of Amendment Two in Colorado has begun what will be a virulent state-by-state battle over gay rights. Enough is enough. The small gains we've made have only spurred us on, not satiated our appetite for equality.

After all the shit my people have taken for so long, it's a miracle that we haven't yet risen up and done some serious damage. I can't think of any minority which has been so oppressed for so long with next to no rebellion.

I don't expect to ever be accepted by society or treated as an equal during my lifetime. I know that no matter how much money my future lover and I make, and no matter how intelligent we are, we're just as likely as the next gay couple to be assaulted on the street for holding hands. It's not that I want to be part of the "mainstream." In fact, I could care less about straight peoples' opinions about queer issues. I simply want—no, demand that—my civil rights be protected like any other citizen's. We will not rest until a national gay and lesbian civil rights act is put on the books.

One of the biggest current political issues is the military ban, but it is a mistake to think the march is about just

one issue. The MOW is a coming together; a chance to focus on the ties which link us together, not the divisions separating us. It will be a positive, communal experience focusing on strength and support. This Sunday will be one of the few chances for queers who live outside of the Village or the Castro to feel that they are part of a large community. It will be our day in the sun, finally.

After the 1987 March On Washington, everyone went home with a passionate desire to change the world. We should expect no less five years later.

A special note: Using the word "queer" is a topic much in debate during these times of careful word choice. On this campus alone, I've been in several debates. Many older gays and lesbians are put off by the word "queer." They feel that the use of the word is fine within our community, but not when talking with straight people. The comparison used is the word "nigger."

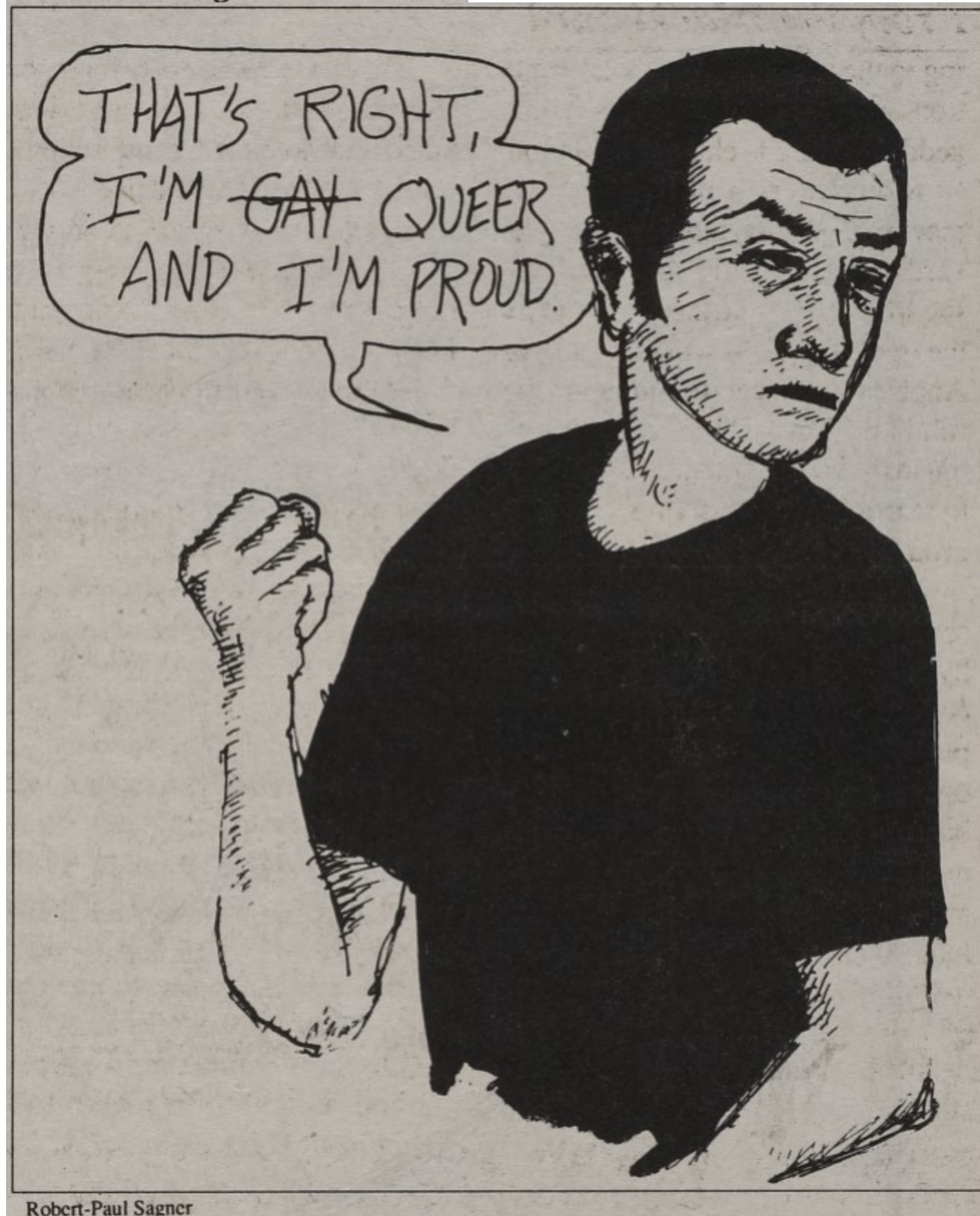
Others (including myself) feel that claiming the word "queer" is an act of proud defiance similar to appropriating the pink triangle that was used to identify us in World War II. They were both acts of empowerment. In addition, an advantage of the word "queer" is its inclusive nature. This one word encompasses gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered persons. On a practical level

cons. On a practical level alone, it makes signs, sentences, and acronyms much simpler. Using the word "queer" represents a step towards the present with a nod towards our past.

## *Depeche Monde*

Conor Ryan, CC '96, writes about his fast world on alternate Thursdays in *Spectrum*.

*C. K. Ryan*



Robert-Paul Sagner