

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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Students join in Washington march

By Ruth Halikman

Spectator Staff Writer

Of the estimated one million people who attended the march on Washington, DC in support of civil rights for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals on Sunday, about 300 of them were from Columbia.

Students who attended the demonstration said the purpose of the march was to heighten public awareness of a variety of issues that affect the gay community, such as anti-gay violence, state laws restricting gays' civil rights, the need for more AIDS research, and the current ban on gays in the military.

"The major emphasis was to participate with others on the issue of equal civil rights," said Ed Falterman, a doctoral candidate in higher education administration at Teachers College who described himself as a "student activist."

Falterman objected to characterizations of the march as a demonstration promoting "gay rights," explaining that gays are not fighting for any special rights that heterosexuals do not have.

“The rights exist already, and we want to be included,” he said.

Falterman, who was one of many students who described the march as an exhilarating experience, said marching as a part of the Columbia gay community was particularly significant.

“Just marching with fellow Columbia students, faculty, and staff was an empowering experience. Too many of us are in the closet,” he said.

Conor Ryan, CC '96, one of the students who organized the Columbia trip to Washington, agreed that the march was empowering for students who attended.

“For a queer person, the most important thing is to be there and be counted. Columbia has queers too, and we definitely care. That’s why we marched as a group, to show our strength,” Ryan said.

One hundred and ninety-six students, 40 of whom were from Columbia College, rode to Washington, DC on buses organized by the Lesbian, Bisexual and Gay Coalition (LBGC), Ryan said.

About 100 other University students provided their own transportation, he added.

Ryan said the atmosphere of the march was one of celebration and support.

“The main thing is that for one

day we all felt like we were in the majority ... You feel part of a large, caring community," Ryan said. "It was a huge showing of pride. It's so empowering to see people who are not ashamed of being queer."

LBGCCo-Chair Amy Chapman, CC '95, said the mood of the demonstration was predominantly cheerful.

"There didn't seem to be too much anger. It was kind of a festive atmosphere," Chapman said.

Although President Clinton was criticized by many demonstrators for being out of town on Sunday, Ryan said he was still convinced that Clinton supports the gay community.

"As much as he's waffled on his promises, I feel like he really does care," Ryan said. "He's never wavered in his support of the queer community."

"After he fixes the economy, then he can make sweeping social changes," Ryan added.

Falterman emphasized that although the march was primarily intended for gays, allies and friends of the gay community were also encouraged to participate .

"Discrimination and oppression affect us all. Once we start discriminating against one group, it opens the window to discrimination against others," he said.