

Freedom to Marry Advocates Speak About Love and Equality at Head-Royce School

BY HUDA JADALLAH, CO-CHAIR OF THE GENDER AND SEXUALITY DIVERSITY NETWORK

This spring the Upper and Middle Schools heard from prominent nationwide leaders in the marriage equality movement, Stuart Gaffney and John Lewis, who shared their personal stories and educated audiences about the process for creating change at both the community activist and legal levels. The talks were timely, coming shortly before the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to strike down the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and invalidate California's Prop. 8.

On March 8th during a Middle School assembly, Gaffney poignantly described his parents' own struggle with marriage equality, noting that the California Supreme Court only legalized interracial marriage in 1948. His Chinese-American mother and white father's marriage was not recognized in many other states which, at the time, didn't allow interracial marriage.

Perhaps the most inspirational moment came when Gaffney described the day in February 2004 when he showed up for a rally in San Francisco and ended up getting married. It was on that day that then Mayor Gavin Newsom defied California state law and gave orders to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Lewis and Gaffney's lesson from that day was: "show up for your life and you never know what will happen!"

They continued to tell the Middle School students to find their passion and pursue it.

On April 19th, Gaffney and Lewis returned to HRS to speak with the Upper School students about marriage equality. This event was the culmination of a week of speakers, projects and events put on by Upper School students in the Gender and Sexuality Diversity Club (GSD). April 19th is also the National Day of Silence and a strong number of HRS students, faculty and staff used the day to bring attention to LGBT issues and identities within the Head-Royce community.

As GSD Club member, Davis Avila said, "Going into the assembly, I had put marriage equality on a back burner. Inside I kept thinking, "This is going to take

“If we are truly **created equal**, then surely the **love we commit** to one another must be equal as well.” –PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA



PHOTO COURTESY OF STUART GAFFNEY AND JOHN LEWIS

decades to happen!” But after hearing Stuart and John speak, the fire was rekindled, so to speak, and it really reignited my hope and fervor for the fight for marriage equality.” Kako Ito, a member of the Class of 2016, who was writing an English research paper on the topic of the religious right and homosexuality, and interviewed Lewis afterwards said, “The audience connected with the speakers because their compassion resonated. John and Stuart showed that as humans we are all entitled to the same rights. “

About his experience speaking at the school Lewis said, “We found it truly inspiring to come speak at Head-Royce. When we spoke at the Middle School the students were so engaged and interested that even on a late Friday afternoon the students listened with rapt attention without making a sound. It was really moving to speak at Upper School on the day of silence because when Stuart and I went to high school in the 1970s it was not just a day of silence, it was four years of silence. It would have been unimaginable for an LGBT student to be able to be open about who they were. Today all of that is changing and it’s great for Head-Royce to be part of it.”

As Lewis and Gaffney noted at the end of their Middle School talk, the Declaration of Independence states that all people are created equal. They went on to remind the audience of President Obama’s second inaugural address, in which he took an unequivocal stand on the issue of same-sex marriage and proclaimed, “If we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well.”

LOVE & EQUALITY