

Six Voices on Proposition 8: A Roundtable

Introductory note by Russell Arben Fox: In November of 2008, I posted some reflections on my blog about California's Proposition 8 (<http://inmedias.blogspot.com/2008/11/personal-thoughts-on-proposition-8.html>). It started a long conversation with many other individuals, some Mormon and some not, some California residents and some not, some straight and some gay, some married and some single, some scholars of philosophy, religion, government, and law, others just passionate and informed observers of the whole controversy.

It occurred to several of us that it would be valuable to put together, in a somewhat formal way, a sampling of our conversation, as well as to enlist some additional views from others who hadn't participated directly but who had something worth hearing nonetheless. The result is the following roundtable, a symposium of voices, all speaking briefly one way or another, and from a variety of ideological, religious, and intellectual perspectives, about Proposition 8, same-sex marriage, homosexuality, Christian doctrine, Mormonism and Mormon political activism, the nature and symbolic significance of marriage, the politics and constitutionality of marriage laws, and the personal, professional, and spiritual conflicts which this particular debate—certainly far from the last our nation will see—gave rise to.

*The contributors are, in alphabetical order: Lindsey Chambers, a Ph.D. candidate in philosophy at the University of California–Los Angeles; Russell Arben Fox, an associate professor and director of the political science program at Friends University in Wichita, Kansas; Mary Ellen Robertson, director of Symposia and Outreach for the Sunstone Education Foundation, who lives in Ogden, Utah; Robert K. Vischer, an associate professor at the University of St. Thomas Law School in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and author of *Conscience and the Common Good: Reclaiming the Space between Person and State* (Cambridge, England:*

Cambridge University Press, 2009); David Watkins, a lecturer in political science at Seattle University; and Kaimipono Wenger, an assistant professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law in San Diego, California.

Two Models of Political Engagement

David Watkins

The hard-fought campaign over Proposition 8, which in November 2008 rescinded the legal right to marriage for same-sex couples in California, is evidence of an important political success for religious conservative political groups who support and seek to advance traditional marriage. Unfortunately, it's a victory they can't appreciate and perhaps can't even entirely comprehend.

On the one hand, they won an electoral victory. Proposition 8 passed with a narrow 52 percent majority of the vote. But their true accomplishment doesn't turn on this particular outcome. Indeed, this narrow accomplishment required a tremendous drain on the limited resources of money, political capital, and good will. The construction of a majority coalition supporting Proposition 8 necessitated the deployment of a number of misleading arguments in which opponents were demonized and in which dubious claims about the legal ramifications of same-sex marriage for churches were made. Moreover, the vote took place at what appears to be very nearly the last possible moment such a coalition could be put together in California. The demographics and direction of existing public opinion suggest that a majority coalition against marriage for same-sex couples will soon be a thing of the past. While religious conservative opponents of marriage for same-sex couples have figured out how to mobilize existing opposition, fears, and concerns, they have not developed a successful strategy for halting or reversing the momentum that exists for marriage rights for same-sex couples.

But the real political victory here—the one that religious conservatives can't yet appreciate or comprehend—has little to do with the fact that Proposition 8 managed to put together a slim