

Last year, an on-the-side-of-the-angels, energetically written book was published to much fanfare in the US. Linda Hirshman's *Victory: The Triumphant Gay Revolution* told the story of America's modern gay rights history with its tambourine-clanging conclusion right there in the title. *We won.*

This would be just peachy as Pride season approaches, a real excuse to roll out the rainbow flags, if Hirshman's theory were true. It is not. Not yet. Revolutions are won by winning battles and the battles being fought to win equality are still being fought bloodily and not to any neat or imminent conclusion. The spirit of Hirshman's title is not wishful thinking, but neither – sadly – is it yet accurate enough for us to order mimosas all round.

For a Pride marcher of 25 years standing, nostalgic over shouting ditties like "2, 4, 6, 8 is that copper really straight?", who recalls marching past the Downing Street gates booing and shouting "Out, out, out" at the Clause 28-propogating Thatcher gorgon beyond, the evolving notion of Pride as "celebration" rings odd. Yes, the world has changed, we are all over telly. I still go - give me a placard and I'm anybody's - but there is a disconnect for me about feeling rightfully happy about being there together and the still-unmet demand of what Pride represents - that we, *us*, this day, in sheer force of numbers, demand equality. Somewhere along the way the anger of Pride became a downer and carnival trumped the day's anarchic spirit of rebellion.

If our presence in the media seems all-conquering, politically we occupy dicier ground. The marriage equality struggle is gnarly and even if victory is inevitable getting there requires fighting - and listening to homophobia, freely expressed, in our halls of governance and from almost all our churches reminds me why Pride should be a day of watchfulness and resistance as well as celebration.

American gay politics is such a complex scorecard of victories and losses, I couldn't march in anything but a happy-angry blur here. At the time of

writing (late May) New York, my home for the last three years - a city like London where gay men and women move to live openly and happily in - feels suddenly unsafe. A man was shot in the face and murdered near the Stonewall Inn, the landmark birthplace of the modern US gay rights movement. A couple was attacked outside a pool hall. Another couple was set upon outside Madison Square Garden. In the week I write this another gay man was attacked in the East Village.

Marriage equality may be the hot gay political issue but, for me, homophobia and all that belies it, emblemised in these attacks, is the more urgent, less easily resolved phenomenon. For that a total change in culture - from educating children up - is required. This won't include so many pretty pictures, not such obvious results; it's not something you can really legislate for but it is vital for change. When US and UK politicians spout homophobia, do they not recognise that their words - and desire that equality remains a pipedream - dovetail insidiously with the queerbashers' fists and guns?

There are reasons to cheer. The basketball player Jason Collins came out, the first high-profile sportsman to do so. The Boy Scouts of America voted to end its policy of banning gay teens from joining the organisation. In Christine Quinn, New York might later this year elect its first female, and openly lesbian, Mayor. However, Republicans moved to deny gay couples immigration rights, supported by politically compromised Democrats. While Minnesota voted to sanction gay marriage, the tortuous progress of Supreme Court deliberations around the Defence of Marriage Act and Proposition 8, forbidding gay marriage in California, continues. Legislative change could come quickly (indeed by the time you read this) or drag on.

In this limbo, my definition of "Pride" remains my first experience of the word. It was as a collective noun: a pride of lions. As a boy I loved the image those words conjured up - and that's how I'll march until "victory" is tangibly, truly ours. You can still shout me a Mimosa, obviously.