

# CONTROVERSY TO MARK ST. PATRICK'S PARADE, DESPITE COURT VICTORY

Last year, in the Hurley decision, the U.S. Supreme Court assured the sponsors of the St. Patrick's Day parade the right to determine who marches in the annual event. However, that didn't end the controversy. Gay and lesbian militants have pledged to protest the march, despite the fact that they are barred from entering the parade. From New York to San Francisco, the patience of the police and the marchers will be tested as radical gays attend to mocking the march.

In a unanimous ruling, handed down on June 19, 1995, the Supreme Court held that the private sponsors of the St. Patrick's parade had a constitutional right to exclude marchers whose message they reject. Justice David Souter said in his opinion that "One important manifestation of the principle of free speech is that one who chooses to speak may also decide what not to say." The decision overturned an earlier decision by the Supreme Court of Massachusetts that the St. Patrick's Day parade came within the state civil rights law's definition of a "public accommodation," and as such could not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

Chester Darling, the attorney who successfully defended the South Boston Allied War Veterans Council, explained that the decision to bar the Irish-American Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Group of Boston did not single out gays. His group had previously barred anti-busing groups, the Ku Klux Klan and anti-gay agitators. "The parade," he said, "is about Irish celebrating St. Patrick's Day in their neighborhood—that's the focus we intend to keep."

In New York, where a previous New York State decision had secured the right of the Ancient Order of Hibernians the right to exclude members of a local gay group, organizers were bracing for another confrontation. The Irish Gay and Lesbian Organization (ILGO) plans to make its presence felt by greeting marchers with their proverbial chant, "We're Irish, We're Queer, We'll Be Here Every Year." Perhaps they will, but they will be arrested if they try to march in the parade.

The Catholic League will be marching in the St. Patrick's Day parade for the second straight year. It is the position of the Catholic League that while sexual orientation, per se, should not bar anyone from marching, those who seek to sunder the purpose of the march—be they straight or gay—have no right to do so.

The major media continue to label the exclusion of gays as "homophobic," thereby vilifying Catholics who seek only to honor St. Patrick. Free speech, the league maintains, is meaningless unless those who would silence it are prohibited from doing so. The principle has wide application and the league is grateful that the members of the high court sustained it.