

# Gay Rights Pioneer Franklin Kameny's Legacy Is Worth Preserving

When Franklin E. Kameny began his public career nearly 50 years ago, what little there was of a gay rights movement consisted primarily of frightened, deferential people who hid behind pseudonyms. Many accepted what they were told by the so-called experts: that they were sick, sinful and criminal.

Meek acceptance was not Frank Kameny's response when he was fired from his job with the Army Map Service as an alleged security risk. This World War II combat veteran could not walk away from the injustice. His 1961 petition to the Supreme Court described "a persecution and discrimination not one whit more warranted or justified than those against ... other minority groups."

The Supreme Court declined to hear the case, but Kameny was resolved to win for his fellow gay Americans their birthright of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. He set out to fight a second war for his country, this one on the home front.

Kameny, now 81, launched Washington's gay rights movement in the early 1960s with no backing other than his own brains and lung power. He declared his homosexuality a God-given blessing. He provided legal assistance to gay servicemen and women. He insisted that gay people speak for themselves and resist being pathologized by psychia-

## The Backdrop

On Friday, the Library of Congress and the Franklin Kameny Papers Project will co-sponsor a ceremony at the library to mark the acquisition of the gay civil rights activist's papers. In addition, 12 of Kameny's old picket signs will be donated to the Smithsonian Institution.

trists and entrapped by police. To each battle he brought the sharp, critical eye of a Harvard-trained scientist.

He co-founded the Mattachine Society of Washington in 1961 and the Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance in 1971. He led the first gay protest at the White House in 1965, fought employment discrimination in federal government service and helped persuade the American Psychological Association to stop classifying homosexuality as an illness in 1973.

Given the wall of resistance Kameny met in the early years, it is remarkable that he was able to bring others into the fight and ultimately to prevail in so many areas. Homosexuality is no longer regarded as a pathology. Civil servants cannot be fired for being gay. Security clearances cannot be denied



BY UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL



BY JAHU CHIKWENDU — THE WASHINGTON POST

Franklin E. Kameny, above, at home last year and, left (second in line), picketing the White House in 1965 to protest discrimination against gays and lesbians.

merely on the basis of sexual orientation. Invasive laws against consensual sex acts have been ruled unconstitutional. Kameny's last goal is to end the ban on gays serving in the military.

This Friday, we are marking the donation of Kameny's papers to the Library of Congress. His self-respect and intellectual confidence shine from the pages of those decades-old letters, congressional testimony, clippings of White House and Pentagon protests, and transcripts of security clearance hearings. His firm voice and philosophical grounding in America's founding princi-

ples remain as trenchant and timely as ever.

Intelligence, determination, tenacity, resourcefulness, courage, love of country. Franklin Kameny was the perfect gay storm. He had the right combination of gifts to play a key role in advancing the American journey.

Today, the same federal government that denied Kameny's humanity five decades ago is embracing his legacy and preserving it for future scholars and historians. Well, not quite the same government. The greater enfranchisement now enjoyed by gay citizens is part of his legacy.

In the 1990s, Kameny eagerly embraced e-mail and the Internet as tools of activism. In the online world he encountered people still hiding behind pseudonyms, an echo of the fearful days of the 1950s. As he did back then — and as we see in his papers that now will be preserved forever — Frank Kameny continues to sign his own name.

— Michael Huffington  
Boston

The writer, a former U.S. representative from California, is a donor to the Kameny Papers Project.

■ Close to Home welcomes pieces on the local community. Submissions must be exclusive to The Post and should be sent to Close to Home, The Washington Post Editorial Page, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071; [closetohome@washpost.com](mailto:closetohome@washpost.com).