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**Damage Control: In the Aftermath of Last Week's Ruling on Gay Marriage -  
Gays, the Black Church, and the Mainstream Media  
Unapologetically Young, Black and Female  
By Jasmyne A. Cannick  
BlackCommentator.com Columnist**

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I had no intention of addressing last week's California Supreme Court 4-3 ruling, which held that same-sex couples have a constitutional right to marry. I politely declined several media interviews regarding the decision and choose to post nothing on my site about it.

Now, for the record, I am a lesbian. So obviously, I agree with the ruling.

However, I disassociated myself from the movement sometime ago when it became clear and apparent that the groups here in California and in Washington, leading the charge, were more concerned with obtaining gay marriage than any other issue affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. They were more concerned with *reciting* quotes from Black civil rights leaders and groundbreaking court cases and pimping out photos of Black gay and lesbian couples on their websites than hearing the concerns of Black same-gender loving people - concerns that most certainly extend into the gay community as much as they do the Black community.

Having failed for the most part at infiltrating the Black gay community and getting us to act as surrogates to deliver their message of marriage over everything else in our community, today these groups remain completely oblivious. Chalk it up to ignorance and arrogance. Ignorance, because their idea of coalition building is telling us what to do and expecting us to go along with it, no questions asked, and arrogance for having the audacity to think that we would.

Since the ruling, these same groups have been busy invading my inbox with emails about why I need to give them my money so that they can fight for my right to marry. I have yet to receive an email from these same groups about the upcoming California ballot initiative that would do away with rent control. I haven't received an email about how the gay community in California needs to work together to help fight the Governor's \$144.4-billion spending plan that includes steep cuts in welfare and healthcare, programs that many lesbian and gay families rely on to make it through. You know, those bread and butter issues that many Black gays will tell you matter more than or as much as the Supreme Court's ruling.

So when the ruling came down I just sat back and watched for what I knew was going to happen and for what did happen.

The L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center's Lorri Jean's mug was plastered across my television set along with reps from the usual suspects, the National Center for Lesbian Rights and Equality California. Scenes of glee throughout the streets of West Hollywood as mostly white gays celebrated in true typical WEHO style and lesbian talk show host Ellen Degeneres and her partner actress Portia de Rossi announced plans to get married.

The *Los Angeles Times* gave the ruling prime coverage in the A section the following day. Coverage that was void of any color. To television news' credit, while they didn't feature any gays of color, they did cut to a group of protesters against gay marriage that prominently featured African-Americans. More recently, the *Los Angeles Times* has published an article featuring liberal and conservative voices from congregations throughout Southern California on whether or not they support gay marriage.

It wasn't until I got to the end of the article, which is titled, "[Coming to grips with same-sex marriage ruling](#)," that I was finally moved enough to write about last week's ruling.

And I quote:

*At Second Baptist Church in Los Angeles, the Rev. William Epps said his congregation has been focused on its 123rd anniversary - which it celebrated Sunday - and has given no thought to the Supreme Court ruling.*

*Traditional Baptist churches "would not embrace same-sex marriages," Epps said, although he would be happy to devote a Bible study session to the matter if anyone wanted.*

*He, himself, has never been asked to bless a same-sex union. And what would he do if a homosexual couple asked him to marry them now?*

*"I'd have to prayerfully think about it," Epps said in an interview. "I would think it would be something I would have to seriously grapple with."*

I want to put this in perspective for you. Out of all the mainstream media coverage in L.A. from last week's ruling on gay marriage, with the exception of the anti-gay protesters, there were no Black faces or voices.

But when the conversation turned to the church...you get the picture.

Maybe had there been some sort of balance in the recent media blitz over the ruling, a balance that illustrated the melting pot we're always claiming to be, perhaps I wouldn't be so annoyed with Pastor Epps' quote in the *Times*.

Epps' quote isn't alarming. After all, he was asked his thoughts and he gave them. What bothers me is that almost never is the voice of reason on gay issues an African-American. If I didn't know any better, I'd think there wasn't a Black church in the country that supported equal rights for lesbians and gays.

With the gay groups, I know that their reasons for exclusion has to do more with the fact that unless they can use Black gays to carry their message to the larger Black community, we're for the most part no good to them, except for the occasional website profile, mailer, or grant application.

With the mainstream media, there seems to be no real interest in thinking outside the box that has been drawn for them by said gay groups. That is why we see the same faces and hear the same voices on all things gay. The same organizations are looked to as the authoritative representation of the gay community similar to the way that Rev. Al Sharpton and Rev. Jesse Jackson are looked to when Blacks are upset.

And even though Los Angeles is home to a plethora of respected Black clergy that is affirming of lesbians and gays, including Agape's Rev. Michael Beckwith, Rev. Eric Lee of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Los Angeles, and civil rights icon Rev. James Lawson, those voices are almost never chosen to represent the voice of reason and African-Americans on gay issues. No, we've got to be portrayed as being negative, helping to fuel the notion that Blacks are homophobic.

Had the *Times* reporters gone back a few years in their archives, they would have come across an article written by their now retired colleague, reporter Gayle Pollard-Terry titled, "A Shout Rings Out," which profiled Black gay Christians and drew national attention. The article featured Unity Fellowship Church Movement, a 26 year-old Black church headquartered in Los Angeles, but with chapters across the nation. Unity was founded by the Rev. Carl Bean for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender African-Americans.

Nationally, the list of prominent Black clergy supporting the right of lesbians and gays to marry has grown exponentially over past several years to include among others: Rev. Al Sharpton, Rev. William Sinkford, President, Unitarian Universalist Church, Rev. Peter Gomes, Harvard University Chaplain, Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, his wife Rev. Marcia Dyson, and Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, former pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ.

Yes, that's right, the pastor whose comments were inaccurately portrayed by the media as being unpatriotic and then used by presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama's opponents to distract voters, is and has been a supporter for equal rights of lesbian and gay couples. That somehow was missed in all of the criticism being hurled at Wright.

In 2004, I will never forget receiving an email from Dr. Wright praising my commentary "Pastor Thou Art Loose" and asking for permission to reprint it in Trinity's weekly Sunday bulletin. I remember speaking to him briefly about it on the phone and thanking him for taking the time to read it and offering to share it with his congregation. I received countless emails from various members of Trinity after it was published in their bulletin, also praising my commentary, giving me hope that all Blacks are not homophobic.

Last week's ruling by the California Supreme Court was unprecedented and has set the stage for another national dialogue on equal rights for lesbians and gays, a dialogue that will eventually extend to the 2008 presidential campaign. I fully expect a repeat of 2004 that saw the Republican Party use the issue of gay marriage to convince Blacks to vote against their best interests. After all, that's what Republicans do best - use the Bible to invoke mass hysteria at the polls. Hopefully this go round, the fact that we're in a recession and a never-ending war, coupled with a Black Democratic nominee and a little common sense, Blacks won't be so easily tricked into voting against their best economic interests AGAIN, with bias media reports portraying all gays to be white and all Blacks to be homophobic.

Hopefully.

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