

June 5, 2008 - Issue 279

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Black Pride Parties to a Different Beat Inclusion

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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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What started out in Washington, D.C., as the only Black Gay Pride event in the country in 1990 has grown to more than 35 gatherings, nationwide.

Starting in April and going through October of each year, more than 300,000 LGBTQ people of African descent rev up for a weekend of social and cultural events. Just last year, more than 350,000 attended Black Gay Pride events throughout the U.S., with the largest events held in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and Atlanta, and smaller Black Pride events like the one in Boston providing an equally important sense of identity and cultural heritage.

Sunday gospel brunches, Saturday night poetry slams, Friday fashion shows, bid whist tournaments, house parties, soul food, Caribbean cuisine and beautiful displays of African art and clothing are just some of the cultural markers that make Black Pride distinct.

But cultural exclusion was just one of a few things gay revelers of African descent experienced in Pride events. Racism is the other. And so after decades of Pride events where many gays of African descent tried to be included and were rejected, Black Gay Pride was born.

"We are not seeing ourselves culturally represented at Pride. We want to show not only ourselves, but the larger LGBT community we are out here and taking control of our lives. Black Gay Pride New England speaks to who we are, and it represents the substance that pertains to our lives," Philip Robinson, a teacher and community

activist told me in June 2001.

Seven years later that sentiment remains. And subsequently as we all rev up each year for Pride so, too, unfortunately, do the fault lines of race and class.

The growing gulf between whites and blacks, rich and poor can be seen in the HIV/AIDS epidemic that was once an entire LGBTQ community problem and is now predominately a black one.

Another example of our division can be seen in the white gay ghettos that have developed and thrived safely in neighborhoods throughout the country. However, with homophobia in black communities, where most of us reside, we cannot carve out a black queer ghetto within our existing neighborhoods and expect to realistically be safe.

But many LGBTQ people of African decent and Latinos argue that the gulf between whites and them is also dominant queer community rewrote and continues to control the history of Stonewall. The Stonewall Riot of June 27-29, 1969 in Greenwich Village, New York City, started on the backs of working-class African-American and Latino queers who patronized that bar. Those brown and black LGBTQ people are not only absent from the photos of that night, but they are also bleached from its written history.

Because racial prejudice was a dominant oppression all black people faced - straight or queer - during the troubling black civil rights era of the 1960's, Dr. Gerri Outlaw, an openly lesbian African-American professor of social work at Governors State University, just outside of Chicago, said, "Had those patrons been white the cops would have harassed them, but there would not have been a riot."

Because of the bleaching of the Stonewall Riots, the beginnings of LGBTQ movement post-Stonewall is an appropriation of black and brown queer liberation narrative absent of black and brown people. And it is the visible absence of these black, brown and yellow LGBTQ people that makes it harder for white queers to confront their racism.

Our themes for Black Pride events are different from the larger Pride events. Black Pride focuses on issues not solely pertaining to gays, but also on social, economic and health issues impacting the entire black community. For example, where the primary focus and themes in white Prides have been on marriage equality, gay people of African descent have used Pride events to focus on HIV/AIDS, other health issues, gang violence and youth homelessness, to name only a few.

By 1999, Black Pride events had grown into the International Federation of Black Prides, Inc. (IFBP). The IFBP is a coalition of 29 Black Pride organizations across the country. It formed to promote an African multicultural and multinational network of LGBTQ/Same Gender Loving Pride events and community-based organizations dedicated to building solidarity, health and wellness and promoting unity throughout our communities.

In recognizing the need to network and build coalitions beyond its immediate communities, IFBP announced in April the formation of the Black/Brown Coalition.

"The purpose of the National Black and Brown Summit is to identify areas for potential collaboration between African-American and Latino LGBT communities, leaders, organizations and grassroots movements, said Earl Fowlkes, president of the IFBP.

BLACK PRIDE IS an invitation for the community to connect its political activism with its celebratory acts of song and dance in the fight for LGBTQ justice.

The Bible is replete with examples of oppressed groups parading in the streets while struggling for their freedom. For example, "the Song of Mariam," in Exodus 15:19-21 celebrates the Israelites crossing the Red Sea while they still journeyed in the wilderness toward the Promised Land.

The Promised Land for all LGBTQ citizens is full acceptance into society and Black Pride plays an important role in fulfilling that promise.

Black Pride contributes to the multicultural aspect of joy and celebration that symbolizes not only our uniqueness as individuals and communities, but also affirms our varied expressions of LGBTQ life in America.

Happy Pride!

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, the Rev. Irene Monroe is a religion columnist, theologian, and public speaker. A native of Brooklyn, Rev. Monroe is a graduate from Wellesley College and Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University, and served as a pastor at an African-American church before coming to Harvard Divinity School for her doctorate as a Ford Fellow. Reverend Monroe is the author of the **soon=to-be-released** [Let Your Light Shine Like a Rainbow Always: Meditations on Bible Prayers for Not-So-Everyday Moments](#). Click on the above link to order now at pre-release pricing. As an African American feminist theologian, she speaks for a sector of society that is frequently invisible. Her website is irenemonroe.com. Click [here](#) to contact the Rev. Monroe.

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