

# The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

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African Americans and the African world.

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## **Gay is NOT the New Black Inclusion By The Reverend Irene Monroe BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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If you are African American and gay, and fighting alongside your white LGBTQ brothers and sisters for queer civil rights, the notion that "Gay is the new black" is not only absurdly arrogant, it is also dangerously divisive. In a presumably "post-racial" era with the country's first African American president-elect, it's easy for some to assume that race doesn't matter.

But when critiquing the dominant white LGBTQ community's ongoing efforts to gain marriage equality and its treatment of blacks as their second-class allies in the struggle a reality check happens - both straight and queer African American communities bond together against their strategy for marriage equality.

Why?

Because race does matter!

Case in point: Proposition 8 and blaming the black community for its win at the ballot box. The Proposition 8 debate has brought much consternation and polarization between white LGBTQ communities and African Americans. And with the expectation of a dominantly white Marriage Equality movement pushing forward a single -issue agenda, the movement arrogantly ignores vital ways for coalition -building within black communities, and honorable ways of connecting their struggle to those of African Americans.

But here's an example that defused the tension in much of the heterosexual African American community when it was publicly arguing that same-sex marriage is not a civil rights issue.

In commemorating the 40th Anniversary of Loving v. Virginia in the June 12, 1967 historic Supreme Court decision that advanced racial and marriage equality in this country, the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc., marked the anniversary by stating the following: "It is undeniable that the experience of African Americans differs in many important ways from that of gay men and lesbians; among other things, the legacy of slavery and segregation is profound. But differences in historical experiences should not preclude the application of constitutional provisions to gay men and lesbians who are denied the right to marry the person of their choice." And in April of 2006, NAACP LDF filed a friend-of-the-court brief in the case brought by New York same-sex couples challenging their exclusion from marriage.

But the Marriage Equality movement neither extends its reach beyond its concerns within its community nor outside of it.

How the marriage debate should have been framed - in a way that speaks truth to various LGBTQ communities of color and classes - has not been given considerable concern.

With no public language to adequately articulate the unique embodiment of LGBTQ communities of color and classes within the same-sex marriage debate, this has become contentious. The dominant white queer languaging of this debate, at best, muffles the voices of these communities, and, at worst, mutes them. In other words, in leaving out the voices of LGBTQ communities of color and classes, the same-sex marriage debate is hijacked by a white upper class queer universality that not only renders these marginalized queer communities invisible, but - as it is presently framed - also renders them speechless.

Within and across states, the Marriage Equality movement persistently dons white leadership. Faces of color become important, visible and needed to the Marriage Equality movement only when the movement is actually pimping a black page from the civil rights movement for a photo-op moment to push their agenda.

The problem of saying "Gay is the new black" poses the following problems for many African Americans:

- The Marriage Equality movement exploits black suffering and experiences to legitimate its own;
- The Marriage Equality movement's rallying cry against heterosexist oppression dismisses its own responsibility when it comes to white skin privilege.
- The Marriage Equality movement appropriates the content of the black civil rights movement, but discards the context and history that brought about it.

This is not surprising because the larger LGBTQ movement has distorted, if not erased, its own history when it comes to the Stonewall Riot of June 27-29, 1969 in Greenwich

Village, New York City, which started on the backs of working-class African-American and Latino transgender patrons of the bar. Those brown and black LGBTQ people are not only absent from the photos of that historic night, but they are also bleached from the annals of queer history and gay pride events.

Because of the bleaching of the Stonewall Riots, the beginnings of LGBTQ movement post-Stonewall is an appropriation of black and brown transgender liberation narratives 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 queer elites in our movement to confront their racism and trans-phobia.

If African American LGBTQ people are not included in the history and in the decision-making issues involving queer life, how then can the movement expect our participation, let alone the rest of the African American community? Sadly, if racism continues to go unchecked in the Marriage Equality movement it won't only cost California's LGBTQ community the right to marry, it will cost us all.

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**The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog**

**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 [Let Your Light Shine Like a Rainbow Always: Meditations on Bible Prayers for Not-So-Everyday Moments](#) . As an African American feminist theologian, she speaks for a sector of society that is frequently invisible. Her website is [irenemonroe.com](http://irenemonroe.com). Click [here](#) to contact the Rev. Monroe.

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