

**AMERICAN ACADEMY OF CLINICAL SEXOLOGISTS**

STANDING IN THE VESTIBULE:

AN ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN LESBIANS AND THEIR  
RELATIONSHIP IN THE FUNDAMENTALIST BLACK CHURCH

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## DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This dissertation submitted by Fiona F. Osborne has been read and approved by three faculty members of the American Academy of Clinical Sexologists.

The final copies have been examined by the Dissertation Committee and the signatures, which appear here, verify the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given the final approval with reference to content, form and mechanical accuracy.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to review literature covering issues regarding African -American lesbians and their relationship in the fundamentalist black church. Research shows that the African-American lesbian is subjugated to multiple minority status roles or 'triple jeopardy' by using subtle forms of discrimination due to their gender, sexual orientation, and their ethnicity. According to research, the African-American lesbian who attends a fundamentalist black church is usually forced into secrecy due to the exclusivist position of the black church that homosexuality is in direct conflict with the Bible and is in opposition to God's intention for humankind.

This analysis will look at an historical overview of the fundamentalist black church from the 1900's to present day. This research will trace the role of the African-American woman in the development of the fundamentalist black church, including prominent African-American lesbians who view the fundamentalist black church as an integral part of their identity. This paper will look at the seven major historic black church denominations with regard to homosexuality, and how it is addressed within these fundamentalist black churches. This will include the factors that influence the African-American lesbians understanding of faith, sin, salvation and homosexuality. The prevailing thoughts, attitudes, and arguments made by the black church concerning the oppressions of gays and lesbians within the church are explored in context to the oppression of African-American lesbians within the black church.

This research will look at the emergence of African-American lesbians in black churches and in Christian congregations throughout the United States. It will examine the implications of ex-gay therapy used to govern sexual behavior within the Christian community and what role it plays when working with the African-American lesbian.

## Methodology

The questions leading to the formation of this dissertation are:

Is the religious experience a crucial component to the identity of the African-American lesbian? Keith Boykin, a former White House aide to President Bill Clinton , says, “It is so disheartening because African-Americans have had strong social connections to their churches but have not been allowed to talk about AIDS or homosexuality, and gays are publicly ostracized by their ministers. It is especially profound for black folks because the church has been a place of refuge, to get salvation and redemption, not condemnation.”

The church plays more than a religious role in most black communities.

The black church serves as a social gathering place and often dictate the politics of its church members. Boykin further states “Religion is the biggest obstacle for black gays and lesbians in accepting themselves. A good number of people who are black, Christian and straight, feel homosexuality is bad and have tried to preach me out of it. Almost everyone I know who is black and gay has an issue rooted in the church. It is so pervasive; it is part of our culture and our community.”

Can an African-American lesbian reconcile their own sexual orientation with their religion? Dr. Renee McCoy is currently the Director of HIV/AIDS Programs for the Detroit Department of Health and Wellness Promotion. McCoy served as first Chair of the Department of People of Color for the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches for over ten years. McCoy writes, “The failure of the black community and the black church to embrace their lesbian and gay daughters and sons has



banished them to certain death in a spiritual desert where no one ministers to them. It also challenges the credibility of the black church. The church must seriously work to develop ways of ministering to black lesbians and gays, or else it must stop preaching an all accepting, liberating, gospel and calling itself a church. The good news of the gospel is that God's love is for all people unconditionally."

How great is the risk factor of losing family, friends and their church family if the African-American lesbian comes out of the closet? Reverend Horace L. Griffin is an Episcopal minister, author of *Their Own Receive Them Not: African American Lesbian and Gays in Black Churches*, and gay man. Griffin writes, "The black church's teaching that homosexuality is immoral has created a crisis for lesbian and gay Christians in black churches. This black-church-sanctioned homophobia produces a lot of twisted black people." Griffin compares the plight of black gays and lesbians to "a game of Russian roulette, where the children of the church are no longer welcomed by the church, and black lesbian and gay Christians find themselves in 'no-win' situations, which end up robbing them of their soul, if not their integrity, family and lives."

What effect does ex-gay therapy have on the African-American lesbian community? Charlene Cothran was one of the keynote speakers at the 2007 Americans for Truth banquet. Cothran was once a leading African-American homosexual activist and the most successful minority publisher in the gay world with her Venus Magazine, which she now uses to spread the Gospel of Christ. Cothran asked the audience, "If you had told me two years ago that I would be a featured speaker at the Americans for Truth about Homosexuality banquet, I would have laughed in your face! I was one of those girls who would have been outside across the street with the gang trying to prevent this

from happening. But God has a way of bringing us full circle, doesn't He?" Cothran further states, "Now I know it doesn't look like it but I want you to be encouraged. Things are beginning to change. I want you to know that many gays, lesbians are tired of this life, and they want out. I'm hearing from them every single day through our Venus Magazine website, and many are walking out. They're not doing it on their own strength because they can't do it on their own strength. No one can stop what they're doing on their own strength. It takes a committed relationship with the Jesus Christ, and they need the genuine open arms of the Church to be there to help them at the point of their need. They need loving and compassionate believers who will embrace them just as they are, and who will continue to walk out with them and not judge them as they grow in grace."

Lastly, has the African-American lesbian found acceptance within the confines of the black church? Rev. Larry C. Menyweather-Woods, senior pastor of Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church in Omaha, Nebraska states, "You know, our folk laugh because black churches add by dividing. There is a church in the community for every personality; all you have to do is find it. Now, that shows how much God loves us."

This research analyzed documentation on the core values of the African-American lesbian within the church community, and reviewed documentation on the acceptance, or lack of acceptance of the African-American lesbian within the black church. The primary sources of materials used to gather information for this dissertation were books, history texts, documentaries, and journal articles.

## Definition of Terms

**Black church:** The term black church or African American church refers to predominantly African American Christian churches that minister to black communities in the United States. While some groups of black churches, such as African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Churches, belong to predominantly black denominations, many black churches are part of predominantly white denominations. Historically, after emancipation, blacks established separate churches to create their own communities, escape white control, and worship in their own culturally distinct ways. They had already created a unique and empowering form of Christianity that creolized African spiritual traditions, a Christian tradition which developed more fully during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Within the black churches, they built strong community organizations and held positions of spiritual and political leadership. In addition, African American churches have long been the centers of communities, serving as schools in the early years after the Civil War, and taking up social welfare functions, such as providing for the indigent, and going on to establish schools and orphanages.

**Bisexual:** Possessing characters of both sexes: of, relating to, or characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward both sexes: of, relating to, or involving both sexes.

**Coming out:** To openly declare one's homosexuality: To openly declare something about oneself previously kept hidden. The process of becoming aware of one's sexual

orientation, accepting it, acting on it, and telling others about it. An individual may be 'out' in some situation or to certain family members or associates and not others.

**Fundamentalist Christianity:** Fundamentalist Christianity, also known as Christian Fundamentalism or Fundamentalist Evangelicalism, is a movement that arose mainly within British and American Protestantism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries among conservative evangelical Christians, who, in a reaction to modernism, actively affirmed a fundamental set of Christian beliefs: the inerrancy of the Bible, Sola Scriptura, the virgin birth of Christ, the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the imminent personal return of Jesus Christ. The term has become to some a pejorative term for historic Christian doctrine while to others it has become a banner of pride. It also sometimes reflects criticism of what is perceived as a narrow view of allowable Christian conduct, such as prohibition of the consumption of alcoholic beverages, use of tobacco, participation in mixed gender social dancing, film, and certain other amusements, and other types of conduct. The Christian fundamentalist movement evolved during the early-to-mid 1900s to become separatist in nature and more characteristically dispensational in its theology. Most fundamentalists strongly disagree with doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church for theological reasons, although in recent years there has been an increase in political cooperation between individuals in both groups on certain social issues, such as in opposing abortion. However, the relationships between Fundamentalist Christians and others are still often strained due to historical/cultural perceptions and strongly divergent views on a number of theological issues.

**Gay:** In contemporary usage, the adjective gay usually describes a person's sexual orientation, being the standard term for homosexual. In earlier usage, the word meant carefree, happy, or bright and showy, though this usage is infrequent today. Gay sometimes also refers to commonalities shared by homosexual people. The word gay is sometimes used to refer to same-sex relationships more generally, as in 'gay marriage', although this usage is discouraged by some LGBT supporters: the rationale is that this usage is exclusive of not only bisexual and transgender people but also lesbians who generally reject labels of being a subset of men, even gay men. While gay applies in some contexts to all homosexual people, the term lesbian is sex-specific: it is used exclusively to describe gay women. Sometimes gay is used to refer only to men.

**Heterosexual:** A person who is physically and emotionally attracted to people of the opposite gender.

**Homophobia:** irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals.

**Homosexuality:** of, relating to, or characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward another of the same sex: of, relating to, or involving sexual intercourse between persons of the same sex.

**In the closet:** The expressions in the closet generally refer to undisclosed sexual behavior, sexuality or sexual orientation. The most common of these are homosexuality or bisexuality, but also include the gender identity of transgender and transsexual people and individuals who enact in sexual behaviors such as BDSM (bondage, discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism) or fetishes. The 'closet' is a life-

shaping pattern of concealment where gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex individuals hide their sexuality/gender-identity in various areas of life, with family, friends, and at work. Individuals may marry or avoid certain jobs or social situations in order to avoid suspicion and exposure. It is the power of the closet to shape the core of an individual's life that has made homosexuality into a significant personal, social, and political drama in twentieth-century America. The term 'closet' is also used in a more general way for any behavior that is potentially embarrassing or controversial, and thus kept hidden, (e.g., 'He's a closet drinker').

**Internalized homophobia:** The experience of shame, aversion or self-hatred in reaction to one's own feelings of attraction for a person of the same sex.

**LGBT:** (also **GLBT**) is an acronym referring collectively to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender/Transsexual people. In use since the 1990's, the term LGBT is an adaptation of the initial LGB. In modern use, the acronym relates to the diversity of Gay culture.

**Lesbian:** A woman who is physically and emotionally attracted to other women: of relating to Lesbos from the reputed homosexual band associated with Sappho of Lesbos. Of, or relating to homosexuality between females.

**Religion:** A religion is a set of beliefs and practices often organized around supernatural and moral claims, and often codified as prayer, ritual, and religious law. Religion also encompasses ancestral or cultural traditions, writings, history, and mythology, as well as personal faith and mystic experience. The term 'religion' refers to both the personal

practices related to communal faith and to group rituals and communication stemming from shared conviction.

**Sexual Orientation:** The direction of one's sexual interest toward members of the same, opposite sex, both sexes, or no sexual orientation.

**Spirituality:** Spirituality, in a narrow sense, concerns itself with matters of the spirit. Spiritual matters are those involving humankind's ultimate nature, not only as material biological organisms, but as beings with a unique relationship to that which is beyond both time and the material world. As such the spiritual is traditionally contrasted with the material, the temporal and the worldly. A perceived sense of connection forms a central defining characteristic of spirituality, connection to a metaphysical reality greater than oneself, which may include an emotional experience of religious awe and reverence. Equally importantly, spirituality relates to matters of sanity and of psychological health. Spirituality is the personal, subjective dimension of religion, particularly that which pertains to liberation or salvation. Spirituality may involve perceiving or wishing to perceive life as more important, higher, more complex, or more integrated with one's world view; as contrasted with the merely sensual. Many spiritual traditions, accordingly, share a common spiritual theme: the path, work, practice, or tradition of perceiving and internalizing one's true nature and relationship to the rest of existence (God, creation (the universe), or life), and of becoming free of the lesser egoic self (or ego) in favor of being more fully one's true self.

**Transgender:** A person whose gender identity and sex differ from each other and whose life experiences cross the gender identification they were born with. Transgender

individuals may or may not seek hormonal therapy, gender reassignment surgery, or other appearance altering methods to align their bodies to the gender with which they identify.

**Transsexual:** An individual who presents and lives as the gender 'opposite' to a genetic gender at birth. Some transsexuals may choose hormone therapy and/or sexual reassignment surgery while others do not.

**Transvestite:** People who enjoy wearing the clothes of, and appearing as the other gender (also known as cross dressers).



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Historical Overview of the Black Church

In the early 1900's African-Americans were denied access to libraries, restaurants, parks and other public accommodations. The black church represented access to public space and hosted a diversity of programs, and was a place to seek God, educate, children, and hold social gatherings. W.E. DuBois attended Fisk University in Nashville, completed his graduate studies at Harvard University, and was the first African American to earn a Ph.D from Harvard University. DuBois wrote an exhaustive study on the history of the slave trade, which is still recognized by educators in the field as one of the most comprehensive on that subject. DuBois characterized the black church as a "multiple site, at once being a place of worship, theatre, publishing house, school and lodge." Professor Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham's research and writing focus primarily on African American women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Higgenbotham is co-editor with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. of *African American Lives* (2004), as well as *The Harvard Guide to African-American History* (2001), co-edited with Darlene Clark Hine, and Leon Litwack. In her 1993 book, *Righteous Discontent*, Higgenbotham states the church also functioned as a "discursive, critical arena, a public sphere in which values and issues were aired, debated, and disseminated throughout the larger black community."

In 1862 the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS), pledged to provide emancipated slaves with 'Christian instruction'. In its report in 1865 the ABHMS concluded that "the training of black men for the ministry as the most direct,

accessible and effective way of teaching the mass of colored people”. Henry Morehouse, secretary of the ABHMS from 1879 to 1902, and who Morehouse College was named in honor of in 1913, coined the term the ‘Talented Tenth’, suggesting that “not to make proper provision for the high education of the talented tenth man of colored colleges is a prodigious mistake. It is to draw the tree that has in it the promise of a grand oak. Industrial education is good for the nine; that the tenth man ought to have the best opportunities for making the most of himself for humanity and God”.

The female talented tenth introduced and promoted white, middle class, values. Founded in 1865, Dr. Malcolm MacVicar was the first Union Virginia University president. MacVicar emphasized the role of the female talented tenth stating that “women played the more direct and pervasive role in spreading correct values throughout the black communities”. T.J Morgan, former secretary of the ABHMS, believed that women’s education ought to be as thorough and as rigorous as men’s, and that higher education developed greater abilities and aspirations in women affirming women’s equal footing with humankind.” Morgan deemed black women no less capable of high intellectual and cultural attainment than white men, black men or white women. Morgan insisted upon equality of instruction and standards identical to those that that white women were receiving at such prestigious colleges as Vassar, Mount Holyoke, and Wellesley.

In his book, *The Black Church from a Gender Perspective*, DuBois wrote, “As I look about me today in this veiled world of mine despite the nosier and more spectacular advance of my brother, I instinctively feel and know that it is the five million women of my race who really count. Black women, and women whose grandmothers

were black, are the main pillars of those social settlements which we call churches, and they have with small doubt raised three-fourths of church property.”

Maria Stewart was a dedicated religious and political witness, who spoke out against slavery, tyranny, economic exploitation, victimization, and injustice. In her farewell address to her friends in the city of Boston she states, “What if I am a woman; is not the God of ancient times the God of these modern days? Did he not raise up Deborah, to be a mother, and a judge in Israel? Did not queen Esther save the lives of the Jews, and Mary Magdalene first declares the resurrection of Christ from the dead? Come, said the woman of Samaria, and see a man that hath told me all things that ever I did, is not this the Christ?” Stewart used the Bible to support her position in the public. She refuted Paul’s warning for women to follow their husbands lead by arguing that had Paul known of the injustice that blacks faced, he would not object to a woman's public activism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century’s, black women were basically invisible historical actors in the drama of black empowerment. Black women’s roles in the church were seen as marginal.

In 1892 Anna J. Cooper, who declared herself the voice of the South speaking for black women alluded to this problem stating, “While our men seem thoroughly abreast of the time on almost every subject, when they strike the woman question they drop back into sixteenth century logic”. It is noted that black Christian women encountered varying degrees of opposition while trying to forge their own separate place at the individual black church level. In the late 1960’s the term black church was used to replace the older reference of the Negro church, which was used by scholars of the previous generation.

In 1990, the late professor C. Eric Lincoln, and Lawrence H. Mamiya coauthored *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Lincoln and Mamiya state that, “In general usage any black Christian person is included in the black church if he or she is a member of a black congregation.”

The religious worldview of the African-American, or the ‘black sacred cosmos’ as coined by Lincoln and Mamiya, “is related both to the African-American heritage, which envisaged the whole universe as sacred, and to their conversion to Christianity during slavery and its aftermath. It has only been in the past twenty years that scholars of American history, culture, and religion have begun to recognize that black people created their own unique and distinctive forms of culture and worldviews as parallels rather than replications of the culture in which they were involuntary guest.”

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) is credited with making sociology a science, and part of the French academic curriculum. Durkheim on religion states, “Above all, religion is a social phenomenon, a shared group experience that has shaped and influenced the cultural screens of human communication and interpretation.”

C.L. Franklin, father of singer Aretha Franklin, friend and ally of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and was also known for his close relationships with gospel’s greatest vocalists Mahalia Jackson and Clara Ward, was deeply involved in the reconfiguration of American democracy for the black American. To reflect the struggle of the African-American during the civil rights movement Franklin compares the plight of the African-American struggling for democracy, to the Israelites who confined by the Babylonians, were forced to sing in a strange land.

Psalm 137: 1-4, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us [required of us] mirth, [saying], Sing us [one] of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?” Franklin preached to his congregation that, “The Israelites should have sung, because some things you can’t say you can sing. In contrast with the Israelites, who had yet to reach their Promised Land, African Americans are in what many countrymen considered to be their Promised Land, but it remains ‘a strange land’ for black citizens nonetheless.” Franklin believed that “If that ‘strangeness’ of segregation and prejudice were to be transformed, black Americans would need to find their individual and their collective voice.”

The Black Church Resource Group is a non-profit organization that works to educate, and empower African-American churches to serve their members more efficiently. The Black Church Resource Group provides resources to African-American churches nationwide to address and minister to the problems facing their specific community. The Black Church Resource Group’s welcome statement posted on their Black Church Page website states that, “The black church is truly the heart of the African-American community. In fact, you may say that it is the community. Throughout all of our struggles in American history, the black church has been a constant in our evolution. It fed our hope during slavery and was our meeting place during the Civil Rights Movement. Through bombings and burnings, it stands strong, steadfast and unmovable. With the good news of Jesus Christ, it is a beacon of light that shines on all those who are broken, weary, and downtrodden. It serves as the center of the African

American community's spiritual growth and time will prove that the black church will be the center of the African-American community's economic growth as well. There is no greater or more powerful institution that exists today for any group of people than that of the Black church. The black church has historically been a source of hope and strength for the African American community.”

The existing research that explores issues related to the the black church focus around a general theme of the black church serving as a community resource, and maintaing the moral and ethical standards of its congregation. Black churches are given the moral authority to advise and lead its congregants. The black church providides its members with a sense of self worth, self-esteem, and well being. The social experiences of poverty stricken blacks differ from upper and middle class income blacks, and it appears that those who do not meet such standards of middle and upper class blacks, are indoctrinated by the black churches to strive to do so. This is vigorously promoted within the black churches with an essentialistic audacity. The black church assumes the responsibilty of bringing the promise of a better life in to the poor black families who are confined to, and isolated from outside influential neighborhoods. Social stigmatization, for the African-American is evident through their consistent ranking at the bottom of the social hiarchy.

Policy making in the black communities are a direct influence of the black church. Mainstream political candidates, both black and white use the black churches to promote their political party, or ideological agenda on issues like job creation, education, affirmative action , health care, prison reform, which have drawn the

African American congregants closer to the Democratic Party, on issues of personal morality like opposition to same-sex marriage, and abortion.

African- Americans are overrepresented in the use of corporal punishment, and disciplinary consequences, and find themselves sometimes faced with using the black church clergy to represent them in court. *Poor Prescription: The Costs of Imprisoning Drug Offenders in the United States*, reports that African-Americans convicted of drug crimes are at a much higher rate than white Americans. This disparity continues through all aspects of the system (arrest, conviction, incarceration), finally disenfranchising more African-Americans once offenders are released. The black church clergy may be requested to become character witnesses for the African-American defendant. The black church clergy may also be called upon to help the disenfranchised African-American ex-offender reintegrate back into society upon their release by helping them to find work, housing, and reconnect with the family through a process of spiritual healing.

Research shows that there is a recurring theme of the African-American woman being represented as the 'strong black woman' whose existence is one of commitment and preoccupation with caring for family and community. Caretaking is viewed as the African-American woman's primary responsibility. First to the household, and then extending beyond the nuclear family to the care of the parents, and grandparents. The African-American woman, dating another woman is often viewed by the black church as frivolous, sinful, and not a part of the commitment to family as the primary caretaker.

## **Timeline on Blacks and Marriage Equality**

The National Black Justice Coalition is a civil rights organization dedicated to empowering Black same-gender-loving, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. The Coalition works with our communities and our allies for social justice, equality, and an end to racism and homophobia. The National Justice Black Coalition compiled a timeline representing the history of blacks and marriage equality throughout the history of the United States of America:

**1724:** Article VIII of the Louisiana Black Code forbids marriages between slaves without the consent of the slave master.

**1865:** Section 3 of the Mississippi Black Code prohibits blacks from marrying whites “and any person who shall so intermarry shall be deemed guilty of felony, and on conviction thereof shall be confined in the State penitentiary for life.”

**Oct. 1, 1948:** In *Perez v. Sharp*, the California Supreme Court becomes the first state court to strike down laws against interracial marriage.

**Jun. 12, 1967:** In *Loving v. Virginia*, the U.S. Supreme Court strikes down laws that prohibited interracial marriage.

**July 12, 1996:** The U.S. House of Representatives passes the Defense of Marriage Act. The **Defense of Marriage Act**, or **DOMA**, is the short title of a federal law of the United States passed on September 21, 1996 as Public Law No. 104-199, 110 Stat. 2419. Its provisions are codified at 1 U.S.C. § 7 and 28 U.S.C. § 1738C. The law has two effects:



1. No state (or other political subdivision within the United States) need treat a relationship between persons of the same sex as a marriage, even if the relationship is considered a marriage in another state.
2. The Federal Government may not treat same-sex relationships as marriages for any purpose, even if concluded or recognized by one of the states.

**Jun. 26, 2003:** In *Lawrence vs. Texas*, the U.S. Supreme Court strikes down anti-gay sodomy laws in Texas and other states.

**Oct. 25, 2003:** Rep. John Lewis, writing in the *Boston Globe*, calls for an end to discrimination in marriage.

**Nov. 18, 2003:** In *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court holds that barring an individual from the protections, benefits, and obligations of civil marriage solely because that person would marry a person of the same sex violates the Massachusetts Constitution.

**Nov. 18, 2003:** Rev. William Sinkford, a black minister and president of the Unitarian Universalist Church, applauds the decision of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.

**Nov. 24, 2003:** Ambassador Carol Moseley Braun states her support for marriage equality during the presidential candidates' debate in Des Moines, Iowa.

**Nov. 24, 2003:** Rev. Al Sharpton states his support for marriage equality during the presidential candidates' debate in Des Moines, Iowa.

**Nov. 25, 2003:** Senator Wayne Allard (R-CO) and four co-sponsors introduce an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to deny marriage rights for same-sex couples.

**Dec. 8, 2003:** The National Black Justice Coalition announces a campaign to build black support for marriage equality.

**Feb. 2, 2004:** Civil rights leader Julian Bond announces his support for marriage equality.

**Feb. 3, 2004:** Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court says civil unions only provide “second-class citizen status.”

According to the timeline on marriage, equality, and blacks, by the 1940’s courts began invalidating laws against interracial marriage. By the 1950’s the governments began relying on marriage licenses as a way of distributing resources to dependents. The Social Security Act provided survivors’ benefits with proof of marriage. Employers made use of an employees’ marital status to determine whether they would provide health insurance or pension benefits to employees’ dependents. Courts and hospitals required a marriage license before granting couples the privilege of inheriting from each other or receiving medical information. In short, the marriage license became a shorthand way to distribute benefits and legal privileges by the government.

Understandably, the marriage license no longer draws reasonable dividing lines regarding which adult obligations and rights merit state protection. For instance, a woman married to a man for just nine months gets Social Security survivor’s benefits when he dies. However, a woman living for 25 years with another woman to whom she is not married to, when her partner dies, she is left without government support, even if her

presence helped the couple hold down a full-time job and pay Social Security taxes. A newly married wife or husband can take leave from work to care for a spouse, or sue for a partner's wrongful death. However, unmarried couples typically cannot, no matter how long they have pooled their resources together, and how faithfully they have kept their commitments.

Research continues to demonstrate the issue of gay marriage to be a civil rights issue, citing that there is no difference for people wanting to marry a person of the same sex as someone wanting to marry a person of a different race. Coretta Scott King, civil rights leader, said "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" Mrs. King went on to state, "I appeal to everyone who believes in Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream to make room at the table of brother- and sisterhood for lesbian and gay people."

Black history shows that there was a time when African-Americans had to jump brooms and do all kind of informal things in slavery to recognize unions that the state failed to recognize, and that the Christian church failed to acknowledge. The literature suggests that the civil rights of marriage between homosexuals may permit a whole class of persons deprived of a civil right to benefit from and participate in the valuable institution of marriage. Further, suggesting that the marriage of two people, whatever their sexual orientation, should be a decision between the two people, and not the decision of the government.

## **The Seven Major Historic Black Denominations**

Lincoln and Mamiya described the seven major historic black denominations as the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church; the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church; the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church; the National Baptist Convention, USA., Incorporated (NBC); the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), as comprising the black church.

For this analysis, we will use these seven denominations inclusively when referring to the black fundamentalist church. According to Herndon Davis, the African-American gay and lesbian population in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church is still separated and disenfranchised from the main church congregants. “We attend church and become more active and visible than most. We tithe, pray, praise, and worship God in spirit and truth, but still we are separated, told we don't matter, and not given as much say in church matters that count the most because of who we are, Gay/Lesbian men and women. Roll the clock back over 200 years, and you have the exact same thoughts, sentiments, and emotions of black church congregants, who attended church, tithed, prayed, worshipped God in spirit and truth. But were still separated, told they didn't matter and were not given a say in church matters that counted the most because of who they were, black men and women. In each situation both groups attempted to fit in, to go along with the status quo, but both eventually got tired of being sick and tired and splintered off into separate denominations and churches that catered specifically to their

spiritual needs as reflected by their life-experiences and culture. As a result, we have churches that are inclusive of gays/lesbians that specifically minister to their needs, experiences and culture alongside churches that specifically minister to the needs, culture, and experiences of the black community at large. In short, we have Gay/Lesbian churches and we have black churches, both splintered movements of a resistant mainstream. Both groups were oppressed, both groups were frustrated, both groups worshiped and praised God, and both groups were separated and treated with indignity.”

The AME church has tried to remain progressive on issues about homosexuality, while still trying to avert a schism. The official position of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is “The African Methodist Episcopal Church is not in favor of the ordination of openly gay persons to the ranks of clergy in our church. This position reaffirms our published position papers, public statements and prior rulings, all of which indicate that we do not support the ordination of openly gay persons.” Before marriage became legal for same-sex couples in Massachusetts, the Rev. Gregory G. Groover Sr., an AME pastor in Boston, explained why AME preachers opposed the move. He was quoted in the Boston Globe on Feb. 10, 2004, as saying: “As black preachers, we are progressive in our social consciousness, and in our political ideology as an oppressed people we will often be against the status quo, but our first call is to hear the voice of God in our Scriptures, and where an issue clearly contradicts our understanding of Scripture, we have to apply that understanding.”

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Methodist denomination was founded in 1796 by black members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City and was organized as a national body in 1821. The church operates in the United States, Africa,

South America, and the West Indies and maintains Livingstone College in Salisbury, N.C. The U.S. membership of the church in 1998 was about 1.2 million, making it one of the largest African Methodist bodies.

In an article on the bicentennial of the A.M. E. Zion Church for Ebony magazine, author Lisa Jones Townsel wrote, “Officially born October 1796, the new Black denomination was chartered in 1801 and firmly established in 1820 when the leaders voted themselves out of the White Methodist Episcopal Church. The next year, church founders agreed to call the church the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America. But to distinguish this New York-based group from the Philadelphia Black Methodist movement which emerged about the same time, the word ‘Zion’ was added to the title during the church's general conference in 1848. With its identity problems resolved, the AME Zion Church made the salvation of the whole person mind, body and spirit its top priority. At the crux of its ministry lay racial justice, peace and harmony, thus earning it the title, the Freedom Church.” An article posted by the Associated Press, on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008 reports that “most of the United States 25 largest church bodies either lost members or experienced no growth in the past year, according to a 2008 yearbook produced by the National Council of Churches. The Episcopal Church, locked in a conflict over the Bible and homosexuality, suffered the steepest decline, reporting a more than 4 percent drop to slightly fewer than 2.2 million members.”

The Methodist movement traces its history in the U.S. back to the first conference of Methodist preachers in Philadelphia, PA, in 1760. By 1801, The Methodist Episcopal Church in America was organized, with its first ‘Discipline,’ publishing house, General Conference and constitution. Conflicts arose about the role of lay representation, the role

of women and human slavery. The Methodist movement split in 1844 after unresolved issues over slavery and the power of bishops. In 1964, the Methodist General Conference added a statement about 'Sex in Christian Life' to the denomination's Social Creed, after 1972 the Social Principles. It read in part: "We believe that sexual intercourse within holy matrimony with fidelity and love is a sacred experience and constitutes a needed expression of affection. We also believe that sexual intercourse outside the bonds of matrimony is contrary to the will God..." The Methodist Social Principles also states that, "Liberals within the UMC generally look upon gay/lesbian ordination and same-sex marriage as civil rights issues, fundamental human rights issues that should be available to persons of all sexual orientations. They also typically believe that a homosexuality is a normal, natural sexual orientation for a minority of people. It is not changeable nor is it chosen. Conservatives feel that homosexual behavior is a sin, hated by God and condemned throughout the Bible. Allowing a homosexual to be ordained would be a massive attack on historical church standards. Marriage is for one man and one woman only. Homosexuality is abnormal, unnatural behavior. It is chosen lifestyle and can be healed through therapy and prayer."

The United Methodist Church *Book of Discipline* currently contains a number of clauses relating to homosexuality:

- "Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church."

- “Self-avowed practicing homosexual is understood to mean that a person openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual.” (*Book of Discipline*, Par. 304.3)
- “Homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth. All persons need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching we affirm that God's grace is available to all. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.” (From “*The Nurturing Community*,” a section of the church's Social Principles, Par. 65G).
- “The council on Finance and Administration shall be responsible for ensuring that no board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality. The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures. This restriction shall not limit the church's ministry in response to the HIV epidemic.” Founded in 1886, the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (Convention) is the nation's oldest and largest African American religious convention with an estimated membership of 7.5 million.



The National Baptist Convention, USA (Inc.), founded in 1886, is the nation's oldest and largest African American religious convention with an estimated membership of 7.5 million. The National President, Reverend Dr. William J. Shaw, has led the organization since 1999. The path to the formation of the Convention was characterized by many previous cooperative efforts and throughout its history, there have been many ups and downs, peaks and valleys, triumphs and failures, splits and attempts at unification. The root of cooperative efforts began in the antebellum period. In United States history 'antebellum' is commonly used, in lieu of 'pre-Civil War,' in reference to the period of increasing sectionalism that led up to the American Civil War. In the South, some independent black Baptist churches belonged to white associations. Attempts to form all black churches into associations or conventions were not allowed. The first attempts at cooperative efforts began in the North.

### Mission

The mission of the Convention is to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ through preaching, teaching, and healing.

### Purposes

“In addition to such ancillary purposes and statutory powers as are detailed in its Articles of Incorporation, the basic objectives and corporate purposes of this voluntary global fellowship are as follows:”

- a. To unite National Baptist churches, district associations, and state conventions in Christian evangelism so as to fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through preaching, teaching, and healing;

- b. To promote home and foreign mission efforts;
- c. To encourage and support Christian education;
- d. To publish and distribute Sunday School and other Christian literature, music, and other works of art and religious expression;
- e. To engage in any other endeavors deemed fitting and proper in order to advance the cause of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

The *National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.* ascribes to eighteen *Articles of Faith* which are adopted by Baptist churches at the time of organization:

*Article I:* speaks on the scriptures. “We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us, and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions shall be tried.” *Article III:* addresses the man’s evil nature, and predisposition towards sin in the ‘fall of man’. “We believe the Scriptures teach that Man was created in holiness, under the law of his Maker; but by voluntary transgressions fell from that holy and happy state; in consequence of which all mankind are now sinners, not by constraint but choice; being by nature utterly void of that holiness required by the law of God, positively inclined to evil; and therefore under just condemnation to eternal ruin, without defense or excuse. *Article VIII:* addresses repentance and faith. “We believe the Scriptures teach that repentance and faith are sacred duties, and also inseparable graces, wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit

of God; whereby being deeply convinced of our guilt, danger and helplessness and of the way of salvation by Christ, we turn to God with unfeigned contrition, confession, and supplication for mercy; at the same time heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our prophet, priest and king, and relying on him alone as the only and all-sufficient Savior.”

*Article IX:* addresses God’s purpose of grace. “We believe the Scriptures teach that election is the eternal purpose of God, according to which he graciously regenerates, sanctifies and saves sinners; that being perfectly consistent with the free agency of man, it comprehends all the means in connection with the end; that it is a most glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, being infinitely free, wise, holy and unchangeable; that it utterly excludes boasting and promotes humility, love, prayer, praise, trust in God, and active imitation of his free mercy; that it encourages the use of means in the highest degree; that it may be ascertained by its effects in all who truly believe the Gospel; that it is the foundation of Christian assurance; and that to ascertain it with regard to ourselves demands and deserves the utmost diligence.

The Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission publishes a pamphlet called *Critical Issues: Homosexuality*. They are:

- People can change their sexual orientation.
- Homosexual orientation is not "caused" by hormonal imbalance or genetic factors, but by an unhealthy relationship with one's parents.
- People cannot be pigeonholed into two classifications: homosexual or heterosexual. A continuum exists which includes various degrees of bisexuality.

- Although homosexual activity is a sin, it is not the unpardonable sin, or the most terrible of sins.
- Homosexuals can only lead moral lives by remaining celibate.

Discrimination against gays and lesbians is proper, in the areas of employment, to protect the (presumably heterosexual) family, and to protect other social institutions. The Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission also declares that the many Bible passages that are commonly quoted as condemning homosexuality are valid.

October 1997, Oliver Thomas of the *National Council of Churches* and Herbert Valentine of the *Presbyterian Church (USA)* were scheduled to talk in support of the *Employment Non-discrimination Act (ENDA)* before the Senate *Labor and Human Resources Committee*. This bill would have prohibited discrimination against persons on the basis of their sexual orientation. A procedural move prevented them from being heard. Will Dodson, director of public policy for the SBC's *Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission* said that he "*walked away from the hearing both sad and angry.*" He was not distressed that the fellow Protestants had been muzzled, and not permitted to speak. Rather, he commented: "I walked away angry because there were actually church leaders who were there to support the bill. As Christians, our response to this issue should be to love the sinner and hate the sin. It is infuriating to hear church leaders suggest that we are showing love for the sinner by accepting his sinful behavior. Christians ought to be helping them to escape a sinful, harmful lifestyle. I can understand how those without Christ would defend their lifestyle. However, it is inexcusable that Christians would defend lifestyles which are contrary to Scripture."

According to the Human Rights Campaign the National Baptist Convention's stance on LGBT issues is, "The National Baptist Convention USA Inc., the largest predominantly African-American denomination in the United States with more than 5 million members, has issued no public statements on its attitudes or policies toward gay, lesbian and bisexual people and the issues that affect them. Traditionally, however, the denomination has regarded homosexuality as sinful. It also forbids clergy to officiate at commitment ceremonies for same-sex couples. And to date, it has been silent on transgender members.

The Church of God in Christ is a "Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in which the word of God is preached, ordinances are administered and the doctrine of sanctification or holiness is emphasized, as being essential to the salvation of mankind. The Church of God in Christ is commonly known as being Holiness or Pentecostal in nature because of the importance ascribed to the events which occurred on the Day of Pentecost, the 50th day after the Passover, or Easter as being necessary for all believers in Christ Jesus to experience. The Church of God in Christ believes that the Bible is the Word of God, and contains one harmonious and sufficiently complete system of doctrine. We believe in the full inspiration of the Word of God. We hold the Word of God to be the only authority in all matters and assert that no doctrine can be true or essential, if it does not find a place in this Word."

The Church of God in Christ speaks on homosexuality through the General Assembly of the Church of God in Christ, Inc., "The homosexual practices of same-sex couples are in violation of religious and social norms and are aberrant and deviant behavior. We believe that these unions are sinful and in direct violation of the law of

God in that they are a deviation from the natural use and purpose of the body. “For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which is due.” (Romans 1:26-27 NKJV). We believe that to legalize such unions will signal ecclesiastical and social approval of homosexuality and sexual deviancy as legitimate lifestyles. Therefore, in spite of the progressive normalization of alternative lifestyles and the growing legal acceptance of same-sex unions; we declare our opposition to any deviation from traditional marriages of male and female. Notwithstanding the rulings of the court systems of the land in support of same-sex unions; we resolve that the Church of God in Christ stand resolutely firm and never allow the sanctioning of same-sex marriages by its clergy nor recognize the legitimacy of such unions.”

The African-American Fundamentalist Church has a history of being intolerant of homosexuality. In looking at homosexuality within the confines of the seven historic denominations, Wellman notes that Southern Baptist Convention holds a strong exclusivist position maintaining that the Bible clearly states that a homosexual lifestyle is in direct opposition to God’s teachings and intention for humankind. The United Methodist Churches and American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., fall under the semi-exclusivist position who contend that the homosexual desires in and of themselves are not sinful, but acting upon those desires are sinful and unacceptable. The Episcopal Church falls under the category of the semi-inclusivist position. The semi-inclusivist position

postulates that heterosexual relationships are the “ideal” relationship, but provide “unofficial acceptance” of men and women who are engaged in same-sex relationships.

According to Clark, Brown and Hochstein, coauthors of *Institutional Religion and Gay/Lesbian Oppression*, “The majority of lesbians find themselves outside of both affirmative theological discourse and institutionalized religion. Many lesbians have become hostile toward a Western religious heritage whose official doctrine and tradition, both Jewish and Christian, are homophobic and heterosexist.

## **HOMSEXUALITY, FAITH, SIN, and THE BLACK CHURCH**

Ethicist Garth Baker-Fletcher says “Acknowledging the active and committed presence of lesbians and gay men in Black churches is an important listening issue. We are living through a pivotal chapter in the history of Christianity where questions about sexuality and gender roles are in a state of transformation and flux. We cannot afford to shut out anyone in this freedom struggle, even though such out of the closet theologizing and ethical reflection has usually been ignored by black Christians. I learned that most lesbians and gay men seek acceptance but experience animosity and rejection in their churches, and gay African- Americans in particular emphasize the importance of religion in their family, community, and history, and say that much of the pain and sadness is made heavier when the black’s church leading role in progressive changes in civil rights since the days of slavery is contrasted with silent or abusive regard for human rights of gay people.”

These are some verses used by clergy in the African-American church to denounce homosexuality: Romans 1:24-27 v.24 “Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves”. v.25 “Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” v26 “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature.” v27 “And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.”



Genesis 19:24 “Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.”

According to Boykin, “The black church is a paradox. On the one hand, it is the most homophobic institution in the black community. On the other hand, it is the most homo-tolerant institution in the black community. The homophobia typically comes in the form of the pastor's ‘hell and damnation’ sermon on homosexuality from time to time. The fire and brimstone are quickly amended from the pews. But when you look past the pastor, the homo-tolerance is clear once you realize that gays and lesbians are everywhere in the church. Many of our black churches would stop running if the gay, lesbian and bisexual members dropped out. That's why nobody ever asks them to leave. Instead they beat them down in the hopes that the gay members will not become strong enough to challenge their own oppression. Therein lies the paradox. The black church has a ‘don't ask, don't tell’ policy about homosexuality. And quite frankly, the religious bigotry in the black church is killing us as a people. It is killing the people who are dying of AIDS because the church won't talk to them candidly about sexuality. And it is killing the people who are dying in the streets because they feel morally authorized to regulate public expressions of homosexuality.”

According to Pastor D.L. Foster of Witness Freedom Ministries, Foster admits anti-homosexual sermons may cause severe emotional distress for gays and lesbians. “To call homosexuality sin is not homophobic, but to use the knowledge that homosexuality is sin against someone for the purpose of driving them away from God is sin.”

The Rev. Dennis Meredith, pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Atlanta, began a change in his teaching against homosexuality five years ago when his son Micah told him

he was gay. Meredith began preaching acceptance of gay men and lesbians a few years ago, he attracted some gay people who were on the brink of suicide and some who had left the Baptist faith of their childhoods but wanted badly to return. At the same time, Tabernacle Baptist church, an African-American congregation, lost many of its most loyal, generous parishioners, who could not accept a message that contradicted what they saw as the Bible's condemnation of same-sex relations. Over the past few years, Tabernacle's Sunday attendance has shrunk. According to Meredith, "What matters most in the Bible, was Jesus' injunction to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself, and that includes gay men and lesbians. Don't let anyone tell you can't do it because of your lifestyle, because of your sexuality, because you don't have an education, because you've done time, because God knew you before you were born, when you were still in your mother's womb. If God loves everybody, who am I not to love everybody?"

Rev. Kenneth L. Samuel, senior pastor of Victory Church in Stone Mountain reflects on accepting homosexuals into his congregation. "Attendance on Sundays has fallen to 3,000 people, from about 6,000 four or five years ago. The church has to come to a point when it has to embrace all the people Jesus embraced, and that means the people in the margins. It really bothered my congregation when I said that as people of color who have been ostracized, marginalized, how can we turn around now and oppress other people?"

Dr. Ralph Blair, Founder of Evangelicals Concerned, Inc. at a lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary on Evangelical Faith and Homosexuality, stated, "Evangelicals have perhaps the most difficulty integrating any expression of homosexuality with Christian faith. But here's what's not so immediately evident: Of all Christians,

Evangelicals should have the least difficulty integrating at least some expression of homosexuality with Christian faith. Evangelicals preach that the transaction at Calvary trumps everything. And it does. It trumps all the sin in the world, whether expressed in horrors of cruelty that are so readily seen to be sin or in horrors of religiosity that are not so readily seen to be sin. And it trumps sin's sequel-death, 'the wages of sin,' and hell itself. Jesus died so sinners might be saved from sin, death and hell. But in antigay rhetoric, Jesus seems to have died so an anatomical technicality might be tweaked and trumped. It's what a couple does with two penises or two vaginas instead of what another couple does with one penis and one vagina that constitutes the sin in the antigay argument."

As Robert A.J. Gagnon, an Evangelical antagonist argues: "the complementarity of male and female sex organs [is] the most unambiguous indictment against homosexuality." Dr. Blair states that "surely sexual complementarity is a bit more complicated than tinker toys! In both heterosexual and homosexual attraction, what draws two people together is the fascinating otherness that each sees in the whole persona of the other, not the shapes of genitalia. Besides, even in the physicality of sexual relationship, much more than the mechanics of genitalia is involved."

Stanley J. Grenz, another antigay Evangelical argues that without such anatomical dissimilarity, "same-sex intercourse loses the symbolic dimension of two-becoming-one present in male-female sex." According to Dr. Blair, Stanley Grenz, "Fails to appreciate the complexity of the one-flesh phenomenon, a union that surely has more to do with two persons than with two body parts. This sin of homosexuality, then, comes down to a matter of anatomical correctness, for whether such same-sex behavior expresses affection

or assault makes no difference. In either case the sin remains in the same-sex component period. That's hardly an adequate view of even sexual sin."

According to Evangelical biblical scholar D.A. Carson, Evangelicals are people of the 'Good News'. The terms 'evangelical' and 'evangelicalism' are most useful when they are held to their etymology in the evangel, "the gospel God promised beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, (Rom 1:2-3), on the assumption that such an 'evangel' is held with firmness and sincerity of heart. In this light, evangelicalism as a movement must be seen to be determined by its center, not by its outermost boundary – and even that center must, in the light of its own confession, constantly be held up to the examination of Scripture." Evangelical historian Mark Knoll adds: "Once past a shared commitment to a supernatural gospel, evangelicals are all over the place theologically."

The president of Southern Baptist Seminary Albert Mohler, Jr. and church historian, D.G. Hart, at Westminster Seminary states that, "No single evangelical tradition exists." Dr. Blair argues that, "If these observations are accurate in general, how can it be argued that – when it comes to a caring and committed expression of same-sex orientation – the Evangelical faith somehow inherently demands a virulent condemnation?"

In the book of Romans, Paul emphasized the unadulterated gospel of God's saving grace and justification by faith in Christ Jesus alone, apart from all conventional distinctions. Especially relevant to this research is what he wrote in Romans 8. 38-39 "For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers,

nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The National Religious Leadership Roundtable which is an interfaith network of leaders from pro-LGBT faith, spiritual and religious organizations, suggests, “Religion is often used to demonize and persecute lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals, just as religion has and continues to be used to justify oppression of other communities. Over the last 30 years, however, some mainstream denominations have made enormous strides in their attitudes, policies and practices concerning LGBT people. For example, the Episcopal Church (USA), Reform Judaism, United Churches of Christ and Unitarian Universalists welcome and affirm participation by LGBT people. Other major denominations, most notably Presbyterians and United Methodists, have hundreds of ‘welcoming and affirming’ congregations and are struggling to determine their denominational views on LGBT people. These shifts have had a profound impact on the way in which Americans view homosexuality and have in turn provided the foundation for winning nondiscrimination protections and other rights in some parts of the country. Equally important, millions of LGBT people have been able to find community and exercise their faith in houses of worship. Despite these advances, the use of religion and religious beliefs to oppose equal rights for LGBT people is escalating, not diminishing. For example, the leaders of the nation's largest Christian denominations, Christian fundamentalist congregations and huge evangelical-dominated organizations have joined forces and mobilized to respond to the supposed threat of same-sex marriage. Their organizing capacity is enormous, and spotlights how imperative it is that the LGBT rights

advocates work with and within communities of faith to reclaim from the right wing the true meaning of moral values.”

Senator Barack Obama, presidential candidate for the 2009 Democratic Party on June 28, 2006, *Call to Renewal Keynote Address*, speaks on the role of faith in the African-American life. “And in time, I came to realize that something was missing as well, that without a vessel for my beliefs, without a commitment to a particular community of faith, at some level I would always remain apart, and alone. And if it weren't for the particular attributes of the historically black church, I may have accepted this fate. But as the months passed in Chicago, I found myself drawn, not just to work with the church, but to be in the church. For one thing, I believed and still believe in the power of the African-American religious tradition to spur social change, a power made real by some of the leaders here today. Because of its past, the black church understands in an intimate way the Biblical call to feed the hungry and cloth the naked and challenge powers and principalities. And in its historical struggles for freedom and the rights of man, I was able to see faith as more than just a comfort to the weary or a hedge against death, but rather as an active, palpable agent in the world, as a source of hope. And perhaps it was out of this intimate knowledge of hardship, the grounding of faith in struggle that the church offered me a second insight, one that I think is important to emphasize today.”

Author Elaine Sundby, in her book *Calling the Rainbow Nation Home; A Story of Acceptance and Affirmation*, writes on homosexuality and salvation, “When I was ‘coming out’, most in the church believed that homosexuals were condemned to Hell. Because of this, I too struggled with this concept and wondered if my very salvation was

in peril. After all, I had no one else telling me anything different. My heart was telling me that God loved me 'just as I am' yet the Church was telling me something entirely different. Which was right? Not wanting to lose my salvation over my sexual orientation, I started my journey here to find God's truth and will for my life. Aware that my own biases would probably cloud my judgment, I decided to start my search using the worst possible scenario. That being the premise that the 'anti-gay' contingent was correct and that those homosexuals were destined for Hell. If I could find any way to scripturally back this premise, then I had determined in my mind that I would accept this as the truth. After all the weight of the Church stood behind this idea and I surely didn't want to risk my relationship with God, no matter the personal cost.”

Rev. Dr. Mel White, author of *Religion Gone Bad - The Hidden Dangers of Fundamentalism*, speaking on what the bible says, and dose not say on homosexuality states, “Many good people build their case against homosexuality almost entirely on the Bible. These folks value Scripture, and are serious about seeking its guidance in their lives. Unfortunately, many of them have never really studied what the Bible does and doesn't say about homosexuality. We gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Christians take the Bible seriously, too. Personally, I have spent more than 50 years reading, studying, memorizing, preaching, and teaching from the sacred texts. I earned my master's and doctoral degrees at a conservative biblical seminary to better equip myself to 'rightly divide the word of truth.' I learned Hebrew and Greek to gain a better understanding of the original words of the biblical texts. I studied the lives and times of the biblical authors to help me know what they were saying in their day so I could better apply it to my own. I'm convinced the Bible has a powerful message for gay and lesbian

Christians. The Bible is a book about God—not a book about human sexuality. The Bible is the story of God’s love for the world and the people of the world. It tells the history of God’s love at work rescuing, renewing, and empowering humankind. It was never intended to be a book about human sexuality.”

Studies show that the Fundamentalist Black Church views homosexuality as a sin, and therefore preaches condemnation of homosexuals to hell. The pastors of the Fundamentalist Black Church continue to cite the Old Testament of the bible to preach condemnation of the homosexual, and has done very little to demonstrate God’s grace to the homosexual by using the New Testament of the bible to cite scriptures. In Matthew 21:31-32 Jesus said to the Pharisee’s, “Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing {this,} did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.” This verse in the New Testament of the bible shows God’s grace. Black pastors who confess the divine revelation as the Word of God will not tolerate any scissoring out of certain passages to accommodate the current homosexual lifestyle. They would rather face God at the judgment being loyal to His eternal verities than compromise for the pastor's present-tense preaching of accepting practicing homosexuals into the congregation.



## **The Black Church's Arguments Against Homosexuality**

The New York Times, March 27, 2007 published an article by Neela Banerjee on the relationship between black churches and homosexuals entitled *For Some Black Pastors, Accepting Gay Members Means Losing Others*. Banerjee stated that, "Given its enduring influence, the black church's failure to fully embrace gays and lesbians as members of the community compounds the confused mind-sets I see in these young men, and calls into serious question the church's status as moral messenger to all of America. Remember, the black church led the struggle for civil rights by championing the Social Gospel, the belief that only by applying Christian principles to social problems could society be redeemed. Also remember that one of Dr. King's closest allies in this struggle, Bayard Rustin, was both gay and communist. In relying on arguments like the protection of the institution of marriage, today's black church parrots its white evangelical counterpart's denunciation of homosexuality. In relying on a strict reading of the Bible's admonishments of homosexuality, these same churches engage in a bad faith rendering of a text that was once used to oppress their ancestors. Instead of forging relationships with gays on common-ground issues that all marginalized people are faced with in America, (healthcare, poverty, education) they distrust and disdain the growing prominence of gays and lesbians in the black community. Also, they slip into a politics of most-favored minority, implicitly accepting the role of protector of their turf against all challenges to the throne. Meanwhile, the churches that have embraced gay and lesbian congregants have done so at the expense of a diminished membership. Congregants would rather travel elsewhere than practice their faith in a 'sissy church.' It's a sad,

telling story of hypocrisy and fear, the more so because the ones who suffer most – boys still testing the boundaries of their sexuality and nurturing paralyzing stigmas about what it means to be gay – haven't even scratched the surface of their anguish.”

Rev. Horace Griffin speaks out against black churches using the Bible to discriminate against homosexuality. “In most black churches, parishioners experienced sermons identifying homosexuality not only as a sin, but with a rage that placed it as an even greater sin, as a monstrosity, a part of a wicked spirit. “The black church is selectively choosing passages to put before congregants. As black pastors continue to condemn gays to hell, maybe heterosexual black Christians should learn from the racist moral failings of white ministers who used God and the Bible to oppose integration.” Griffin refers to the book of Genesis and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. “It's a common story to churchgoers about two cities destroyed because of the wickedness of homosexuality.” Griffin further states that the “The real lesson is that God abhors sexual violence”. Griffin claims “the book of Leviticus deems eating shrimp or pork, or wearing clothes of mixed fabric to be as sinful as homosexuality, members of the black church tend only to focus on the latter.”

Reverend H. Beecher, pastor of a predominantly black church in Washington D.C. condemns homosexuality saying, “those who seek to find a way to legitimize this particular lifestyle will meet with no success.”

Boykin in a Village Voice article titled, ‘*Whose Dream? Why the black church opposes gay marriage*’ writes, “Far too many black gays and lesbians maintain a truce with the church that allows them to serve quietly, and this conspiracy of silence enables the church to remain simultaneously the most homophobic institution in the

black community and the most homo-tolerant. While black gays and lesbians have been sidelined, the white gay community has been caught off guard. As conservatives wisely used black ministers to speak against same-sex marriage, the gay community put out images of white couples and put white spokespeople forward, thereby creating the perception that this is an issue for white folks trying to cash in on the black struggle. It seems obvious that black messengers are more effective than whites in communicating with black audiences. Maybe that, too, is one of the lessons of the Brown case. Despite all the progress toward integration, black people still don't trust white people, even those who suffer from discrimination themselves. Beneath the surface of racial tolerance, we're still a country divided by skin color—and certainly the gay community is divided by race. Given their unique role straddling two worlds, black gays and lesbians may hold the key to unlocking the door of homo-tolerance in the black community. I think the black community is going to become more accepting, more tolerant.”

Julian Bond has served since 1998 as Chairman of the Board of the NAACP, the oldest and largest civil rights organization in the United States. In 2002, he received the prestigious National Freedom Award. Mr. Bond is the holder of twenty-five honorary degrees; he is a Distinguished Professor at American University in Washington, DC, and a Professor in history at the University of Virginia, he is a leader of the American Civil Rights Movement, and cofounder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Mr. Bond predicts, “I can't place a timetable on it, but I'll tell you one thing: It depends on the degree to which black gays and lesbians begin to stand up in their churches, in their organizations, and say, this is me you're talking about. That's a powerful, powerful message.”

Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Chicago minister, and former minister of Democratic Presidential candidate Senator Obama gave a sermon entitled “Good News for Homosexuals”, Rev. Wright cautions African American clergy against misusing scriptures by using biblical interpretations to condemn homosexuality. “Racists tried to misuse certain text taken out of context to justify black folks in chattel slavery. Just as we study those scriptures carefully and put them up against the counsel of God, we need to do the same with the scriptures on homosexuality. Whether they are in Leviticus, Corinthians, Romans or Genesis, we need to study the texts in context.”

Carlton Veazey, president of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, and organizer of the Black Religious Summit surmises, “We recognize that there is a great resistance in the church because of ignorance and what they have been taught.”

In his article, *No Comparison between Gay Agenda and Civil Rights Movement*, Pastor Talbert W. Swan, II of Solid Rock Church of God in Christ addresses the “travesty that denies morality” when talking about the brewing controversy surrounding the issue of gay marriage being compared to the civil rights movement. Swan addresses the ruling of the Massachusetts Supreme Court that the state's constitution guarantees gay couples the right to marry. Swan says the comparison and the Supreme Court's ruling was “offensive and insidious”. Swan further states that “The ruling threatens the sanctity of the God-given institution of marriage”. Pastor Swan states that, “the homosexual movement is quick to compare their plight to the holocaust and the civil rights struggle in an attempt to exploit moral capital earned by others.” Pastor Swan inadvertently misses the blatant discrimination that makes the gay and the civil

rights movement the same, and the denial of each individual to have equal rights under the law.

## **Oppression of African-American Lesbians in Black Churches**

Frances Beal, who was the National Secretary of the Black Radical Congress and a political writer for the (San Francisco) *Bay View Newspaper*, was also a founding member of the Third World Women's Alliance (1968-1980). One of her most famous works was *Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female*. The article had a major impact on Black feminism and influenced generations of women of color. In her book, *Slave of a Slave No More* speaks about the oppression of the African-American woman. "Since her arrival on these alien shores, the black woman has been subjected to the worst kinds of exploitation and oppression. As a black, she has had to endure all the horrors of slavery and living in a racist society; as a worker, she has been the object of continual exploitation, occupying the lowest place on the wage scale and restricted to the most demeaning and uncreative jobs; as a woman, she has seen her physical image defamed and been the object of the white master's uncontrollable lust and subjected to all the ideals of white womanhood as a model to which she should aspire; as a mother, she has seen her children torn from her breast and sold into slavery, she has seen them left at home without attention while she attended to the needs of the offspring of the ruling class. Today, the Afro-American woman sees her children afflicted by dope addiction, the lack of a decent education and subjected to attacks by a racist society, legal lynchings, cannon fodder for America's imperialist wars of aggression, populating the prisons of this nation, etc. In addition, besides suffering the common fate of all oppressed and exploited people, the Afro-American woman continues to experience the age-old oppression of woman by man. In the home, she becomes the 'slave of a slave'. By giving men a false feeling of superiority in the home, or in relationships with women, certain aspects of

capitalist tension are alleviated. Men may be cruelly exploited and subjected to all sorts of dehumanizing tactics on the part of the ruling class, but at least they can take out their frustration on someone else - their women.” Beal expresses her sentiments on the role of the African- American woman, “The history of our people in this country portrays clearly the prominent role that the Afro-American woman has played in the on-going struggle against racism and exploitation. As mother, wife and worker, she has witnessed the frustration and anguish of the men and women and children in her community and on the job. As revolutionary, she will take an active part in changing this reality. The slave of a slave is a creature of the past. I doubt very seriously, given our history of resistance and struggle, whether working class and poor Afro-American women are going to exchange a white master for a black one.”

Social ethicist Peter Paris makes a proposal that there is a communality of what the religious and moral discourse is and it is based on the African worldview or African proverb, “*I am because we are.*” Mr. Paris makes three arguments to formulate his theory of social ethics. He argues first that, “African peoples both on the continent and in the diaspora are diverse in cultural form yet united in their underlying spirituality.” (2) This is evident by the different languages and cultural conventions that embody the fundamental values of a particular group. He uses the metaphor “unity in diversity” for African Spirituality. Secondly, he argues “that the realities of cultural diversity and the unity of African spirituality both separate and unite African and African American religious and moral traditions.” And finally, Mr. Paris argues, “that a dynamic principle of unity permeates the diversity of African cultural traditions both on the continent and in the African Diaspora.”

E. Franklin Frazier, the author of *The Negro Family in America*, described the special role of the mother in the slave family. “Among the vast majority of slaves, the Negro mother remained the most stable and dependable element during the entire period of slavery...Most of the evidence indicates that the slave mother was devoted to her children and made tremendous sacrifices for their welfare. She was generally the recognized head of the family group. She was the mistress of the cabin, to which the ‘husband’ or father often made only weekly visits. Under such circumstances a maternal family group took form and the tradition of the Negro woman's responsibility for her family took root.”

Sojourner Truth, was the self-given name, of Isabella Baumfree, an American abolitionist and women's rights activist. Truth was born into slavery in Swartekill, New York. Her best-known speech, *Ain't I a Woman?*, was delivered in 1851 at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. Truth articulated the thoughts of many black women of the time, “There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about the colored women; and if colored men get their rights, and not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before. So I am for keeping the thing going while things are stirring; because if we wait till it is still, it will take a great while to get it going again...I want women to have their rights. In the courts women have no right, no voice; nobody speaks for them. I wish woman to have her voice there among the pettifoggers... I have done a great deal of work; as much as a man, but did not get so much pay. I used to work in the field and bind grain, keeping up with the cradler; but men doing no more, got twice as much pay...We do as much, we eat as much, we want as much...What we want is a little



money...When we get our rights, we shall not have to come to you for money, for then we shall have money enough in our own pockets; and maybe you will ask us for money. But help us now until we get it. It is a good consolation to know that when we have got this battle once fought we shall not be coming to you any more... I am glad to see that men are getting their rights, but I want women to get theirs, and while the water is stirring I will step into the pool. Now that there is a great stir about colored men's getting their rights is the time for women to step in and have theirs...[M]an is so selfish that he has got women's rights and his own too, and yet he won't give women their rights. He keeps them all to himself..."

Victor Anderson, a Professor of Ethics, at Vanderbilt University states, "By comparison to Black Psychology, Sociology, and Cultural Studies, African American theologians and clergy are surprisingly silent on many of the topics related to sexual ethics. Topics include homosexuality, same sex unions, premarital sex, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (i.e. HIV/AIDS and resistant strains of herpes), pornography, prostitution (both male and female), and the like. In a time when at the national level sexual misconduct and morality is the clamor of media discourse, both in politics and religion, only a few African-American theologians and religious cultural critics have mentioned the impact of many of these issues on the black churches. Yet, I think that the future of the black churches and their credibility as a mediating institution within the black community is severely threatened by the failure of the churches, clergy and African American theologians to take on directly and critically issues in sexual ethics."

Michael Eric Dyson, a religious critic, offers an account of the tensions in sexual ethics and the black church in his book *Race Rules: Navigating the Color Line*. Dyson expresses much of the sexual teachings and attitudes of the black churches as having been “derived from dualistic assumptions about the body and soul of early Christian theologians which were disseminated through the white churches to blacks”. This dualism between body (matter) and Soul (spirit and eternal) is then “re-inscribed on black culture through the black churches.” In their attitudes toward sexuality, Dyson accounts for the lack of moral leadership by black churches and the clergy on sexual ethics to white sexual distortions, which the black churches inherited from the homophobic practices of slavery. Consequently, Dyson states that “the black churches are complicit in white Manichean sexual theologies in which the body is regarded as evil and the soul worthy of salvation”. By contrast, Dyson argues, “in black, religious discourse the black body is exonerated in ecstatic and ejaculatory forms of worship, recognizes preaching, and enthusiasm for social justice”. However, he also states that “the black churches have not developed a sexual theology, much less a theology of homoerotica or homosexuality that is compatible with its erotic qualities in worship.” Rather, “the white sexual theologies of the black churches are at odds with the sexual interests and loves of their members.” Dyson traces the homophobic practices of the black churches to their conceptual dependence on white theology. Dyson sees this dualism at work in the interplay between the black pulpit, and the black preacher’s railings against homosexuality. Dyson notes that, “Sunday after Sunday, the black church uses his or gay members to play music and sing songs that will set the stage for his or her delivery and his or her hortatory ejaculations”. Dyson suggests that, in this ritualized, erotic moment

of worship a certain irony occurs. The preacher renders his gay members complicit in acts of self-hatred, while the musical performances of gay members negate the gay bashing sermon just preached. According to Dyson, “the black churches sexual theologies suggest a fundamental contradiction between their liberationist orientations toward social justice and their refusal to unlock the oppressive closet for gays and lesbians”. He also extends these contradictions to homosexual members themselves who participate “in acts of self-hatred in their denials and secrecy while they affirm the homophobia of their churches.” Dyson concludes by saying that “all of these homophobic practices can be seen as consequences of blacks’ endorsements of a white ideology of heterosexism that is rationalized under a body/soul dualism.” If the black churches are to be faithful to their essential nature as liberating, prophetic institutions which are fundamentally motivated toward social justice, according to Dyson, “the churches must develop a black theology of sexuality and homoeroticism.” He also calls for black gays and lesbians to come out of their sexual closets where “they can leave behind as well the destructive, erotic habits that threaten their lives.” Dyson asks the black churches to “affirm healthy unions between gays and lesbians adults”, and he asks the black churches “to make certain their solidarity with the despised members of our society.” Dyson further argues that “the despised in this case are not the homeless, prostitutes, or crack heads, but black gays and lesbians. Black Christians, who have been despised and oppressed for much of our existence, should be wary of extending that oppression to our lesbian sisters and gay brothers.” He calls for the black churches to be “centers of sexual healing”, and for black churches to be at the “forefront of sexual justice, just as they have

been at the forefront of every major social, political, and moral movement in black culture.”

In a study conducted by Dr. Robert M. Franklin, President of Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, GA, and drawing on survey data from the Hampton University Ministers Conference in 1992, Franklin discusses the black clergy responses to various moral issues. Among the issues on which the ministers were surveyed is sexuality. “Of sermons preached on sexuality by the total respondents surveyed (600), 79.3% taught about or preached on sexuality; 85.3% preached against premarital sex. 77.1% preached on homosexuality while 79% indicating categorical opposition. On *Roe v. Wade*, almost half, 48.2%, opposed abortion in principle. 15.4% supported it categorically, while 27.7% supported it with qualifications. The most surprising indicator among the clergy surveyed in the Hampton study is that 34.6% of the clergy regarded HIV/AIDS a divine curse. On the distribution of condoms in public schools, 75.8% indicated opposition. 86.8% indicated that they would dedicate a baby born out of wedlock. And 86.8% required some form of premarital counseling before performing a wedding. Franklin concludes that on sexual practices ranging from abortion to homosexuality, “black clergy tend to be overwhelmingly conservative and non-progressive.”

Poppy Dixon, is the creator and editor of the ‘*Adult Christianity*’ website which embraces sexuality in all its forms, and list itself as a website which is woman friendly, queer-friendly, and sex positive, offering a space where people who have suffered from religious abuse, or people who are questioning or searching, can communicate with

others, and find resources for their journey. Ms. Dixon writes in an article entitled *Strange Fruit: Comparing the Struggles of African-Americans for Civil Rights with the Struggles of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Peoples* “A little more than a month after the nation was rocked by the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard, a black transgendered woman, Rita Hester, was stabbed to death in her Boston apartment. And on the 4th of July 2000, two teenagers murdered a gay African American man, Arthur ‘J.R.’ Warren. He was kicked and beaten, his skull fractured, and then driven over by his captor’s car four times. Hester and Warren violated the boundaries of both race and gender. To claim their deaths were caused by one prejudice, and not the other, would be presumptuous. Power is granted to the powerful on the basis of privilege. It benefits the powerful to extend, or allow, privilege based upon its own interests. By dividing a group to whom it must concede rights, power limits the damage done to its own power base. Power will concede rights to women, but not lesbian women; or to blacks, but not black homosexuals; to gays, but not to gay transgendered; and so on. Power divides based on its own interests, and these divisions are always suspect.” Dixon goes on to state that, “the perceived division between African-Americans and the LGBT communities is a political construction, based on a foundation of white heterosexuality. This construction assumes several things; that both whiteness and heterosexuality are the norm. It assumes that African-Americans are heterosexual, and that homosexuals are white, and therefore have nothing in common. The carrots of 'normalcy,' heterosexuality and whiteness in this case, are dangled before each community as incentive to deny commonality with the other. But crossover exists. There are African-American lesbians, gay African-American

men, African-American bisexuals, and transgendered African-American women and men. For these people the issue of gay rights is an issue of civil rights.”

At *BASH-IN*, an event sponsored by Yale Political Union's Queer Caucus Julian Austin’s thoughts mirror those of many conservative Christians, “When people try to compare black oppression with homosexual oppression, I think there is something wrong. Black people are born the way they are. And you can't hide the fact that you are black, because that's what you look like. But with homosexuality, you can hide it if you desire.”

Representative John Lewis of Georgia marched beside Martin Luther King, Jr., in the Civil Rights marches of the 60s. In his speech to Congress in 1996 against legislation of the ‘Defense of Marriage Act’, Representative Lewis said, “I will not turn my back on another American. I will not oppress my fellow human being. I have fought too hard and too long against discrimination based on race and color not to stand up against discrimination based on sexual orientation.”

In his book, *Race, Crime and Punishment*, William Raspberry states that, “Discrimination and prejudice still adversely affect African Americans. Racial profiling by police is an acknowledged problem in the United States. African American youths are arrested at a disproportionate rate, are detained and institutionalized more often, and are more likely to be tried as an adult. African-Americans are overrepresented on death row.”

The Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights Committee on the Judiciary, One Hundred Third Congress, Second Session, March 1994, prepared with the assistance of the Death Penalty Information Center states, “Because of these disparities in our

justice system, any law that adversely affects LGBT peoples will disproportionately affect African Americans - further qualifying it as a racist law.”

Dixon notes that, “Lesbians and gays have been adversely affected by the law for most of American history. Police have commonly raided bars and organizations they've frequented, denying the right to lawful assembly. And lesbians and gays have been denied police and medical assistance, as evidenced by the death of Tyra Hunter, a black transgendered woman, due to criminal neglect by police and medical officials. Hunter's mother was awarded \$1.75 million in a wrongful death suit brought against the District of Columbia.” Another key way that those in power oppress others is by controlling their sexuality. According Dixon, “There was a time in the United States when blacks were not legally allowed to marry. At one time they lacked the legal right to define their families, and were under constant threat of having their children taken from them. These injustices were condoned by many Christian churches at the time. Even after slavery was abolished African-American marriage continued to be restricted. African-Americans were not allowed to marry ‘outside of their race,’ or more specifically they were denied marriage to white people.”

During slavery, blacks created their own rituals to recognize and honor marriage and family, one borrowed from the African tradition of ‘jumping the broom.’ Still today many African-Americans are legally denied marriage to the man or woman that they love; if they happen to be homosexual. This is further illustrated by Rev. Dr. Mel White who speaks on using the Bible to oppress LGBT, “historically, people’s misinterpretation of the Bible has left a trail of suffering, bloodshed, and death. Over the centuries people who misunderstood or misinterpreted the Bible have done terrible things. The Bible has

been misused to defend bloody crusades and tragic inquisitions; to support slavery apartheid, and segregation; to persecute Jews and other non-Christian people of faith; to support Hitler's Third Reich and the Holocaust; to oppose medical science; to condemn interracial marriage; to execute women as witches; and to support the Ku Klux Klan. Shakespeare said it this way: 'Even the devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.' We'd like to believe that no person of good will would misuse the Bible to support his or her prejudice. But time and time again it has happened with tragic results."

In the 16th century, John Selden pointed at two Latin words carved into a marble wall in an ancient church in Rome: 'Scrutamini Scripturas,' which means search the scriptures. Selden said, "These two words have undone the world."

Ebony magazine ran an article April, 1979 about African-Americans and homosexuality entitled '*Has the Sexual Revolution Bypassed Blacks?*' Dr. Robert Staples concludes, "One of the effects of the sexual revolution is the increase in visible homosexuality. The increase in people assuming overt gay lifestyles is largely confined to the black male. Despite a black male shortage, relatively few black women have joined the community of overt lesbians. Like the black male homosexual, many black lesbians are deeply involved in the White homosexual community." A student at Columbia University, who was spokesman of its Afro-American Society, was quoted as saying: "In a time when Black people are working to create a nation of men and women, we don't have time to wallow in the mud with people who cannot decide if they are men or women." According to African-American lesbian, S. Diane, "It is this thought that is oppressing many black gays. Once visible, a black lesbian, like all open gays, will be a sinner in the eyes of the church, sick in the eyes of the psychiatrists, and perverted in the



eyes of society. If she presently is able to function without being attached to a gay organization, or involved in an ongoing consultation with a psychiatrist, she no doubt considers herself well off. And to the open black lesbian, being well off might be living with another woman, going to work, maintaining a household, and partying within one's Gay clique. It does not involve making one's self obvious to one's straight coworkers and neighbors. A black lesbian does not make herself obvious a great many times because those very coworkers and neighbors are members of the black community.”

Research shows that there is a strong influence from the African-American Fundamentalist Church on their African-American lesbians' congregants and families. The African-American lesbian is tolerated within the church, but the church demands they keep silent about their sexual orientation. The African-American lesbian is shunned into denial partly due to the homophobia of the majority. The scriptures are used to condemn homosexuality. The African-American lesbian struggles to fit into the traditional black community because she is gay, yet cannot assimilate one-hundred percent into the gay world because she is black, and brings her cultural and spiritual beliefs with her to the table.

## **The African-American Lesbian Voice of Womanism**

Alice Malsenior Walker is an American author, self-declared feminist and womanist - the latter a term she herself coined to make special distinction for the experiences of women of color. She has written at length on issues of race and gender, and is most famous for the critically acclaimed novel *The Color Purple*, for which she won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Walker's definition of a womanist is "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually", and that womanism is about African-American women shaping their community, their relationship between mothers and daughters and their struggle to survive. Research shows that there is hesitancy on the part of the African-American woman to discuss 'sexism' within the black community. The African-American women generally views 'sexism' as a white woman's issue, and avoids discussing sexism issues for fear of being accused of imposing outside white values on the black community, or of being a lesbian. Since the African-American woman is the center of, and responsible for nurturing the black community, they must continue to put the household and community first, and self last. One of the ways the African-American lesbian can begin to eliminate oppression is to challenge the stereotype sexual images assigned to black women.

According to Paul Germond and Steve DuGruchy in *Aliens in the Household of God*, the Christian womanist needs to confront the homophobia and heterosexism that exist in African-American communities. They must also be willing to listen to the black lesbian voices that are helping to shape womanism.

Germond and DeGruchy state that “ listening to the black lesbian voices is essential to womanist, by acknowledging the existence of black lesbians in the community and the black church, womanist will be able to confront the denial and invisibility of homosexuality that is a symptom of heterosexist oppression.”

## FAMOUS AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHRISTIAN LESBIANS

Barbara Jordan was born in the Fifth Ward of Houston, Texas to a Black Baptist minister, Benjamin Jordan, and a domestic worker, Arlyne Jordan. Ms. Jordan, was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1972, she was the first African American woman to be elected to that body from a Southern State. Jordan gave the keynote address to the Democratic National Convention in 1976, and became the first woman to deliver a keynote. Jordan was known for her work on the House Judiciary Committee during the Watergate hearings that would lead to the resignation of President Nixon.

According to Ann Fears Crawford, in her book, *Barbara Jordan: Breaking Barriers*, “Barbara Jordan lived with Nancy Earl in their home in Texas. The two met on a camping trip in the 1960's and lived together for two decades. In 1976, they built a house in Austin. There is no record of Jordan ever being asked about her sexual orientation, but early in her career she was warned by campaign managers to avoid being photographed with her female companion. This was before she met Nancy Earl.”

In an excerpt from the eulogy for Ms. Jordan from the Good Hope Memorial Service, “The church played an important role in Ms. Jordan’s life. As a final measure of her lifelong commitment to her beloved Good Hope Baptist Church, on December 30, 1995, Ms. Jordan agreed to serve as Honorary Chair of the Hope for Families, Inc. Hope for Families is dedicated to rebuilding the community by rebuilding families through innovative and creative programs designed to address the holistic needs of people in the

greater Houston area, and will serve as a continuation of the Good Hope legacy of service to the Fourth Ward community.

Jordan's testified before the House Judiciary Committee, July 25, 1974, "My faith in the Constitution is whole, it is complete, it is total and I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the Constitution."

Barbara Jordan on tolerance, "How do we create a harmonious society out of so many kinds of people? The key is tolerance -- the one value that is indispensable in creating community. One thing is clear to me: We, as human beings, must be willing to accept people who are different from ourselves."

Research suggests that Mabel Hampton, a Black lesbian pioneer was an inspiration to many in the course of her lifetime. Hampton was as a major contributor to the *Lesbian Herstory Archives* in New York. Throughout the span of her lifetime, Hampton collected memorabilia, letters, and detailed records documenting her history around the world as a black woman and as a lesbian. It is reported that Hampton met Lillian Foster in 1932, quickly fell in love, and they remained a couple for 45 years, weathering World War II, the Civil Rights era, and the Stonewall Rebellion, until Ms. Foster's death in 1978.

"Perhaps most interesting about Mabel Hampton is how integrated a life she led. She was surrounded by her lesbian contemporaries, volunteered for the New York Defense Recreation Committee collecting cigarettes and refreshments for soldiers during World War II., and was her community's air raid service warden in 1943. Despite her meager salary she attended performances by the National Negro Opera Company and regularly contributed to the Martin Luther King Memorial Fund and later to gay organizations. Mabel Hampton clipped articles, kept letters, and later donated her treasures to the

*Lesbian Herstory Archives.* Hampton marched in the first national gay and lesbian civil rights march in Washington, appeared in the films *Silent Pioneers* and *Before Stonewall*. She inspired members of the gay and lesbian community in New York, and through her gifts to the Lesbian Herstory Archives, shared her tremendous history with the rest of the world.” This is the Mission and Principles of the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Our Mission and *Principles*: From the beginning the Archives' founders developed a statement of purpose and a set of principles to guide the development of the collection. We adhere to these purposes and principles today. *Statement of Purpose*: The Lesbian Herstory Archives exists to gather and preserve records of Lesbian lives and activities so that future generations will have ready access to materials relevant to their lives. The process of gathering this material will uncover and collect our herstory denied to us previously by patriarchal historians in the interests of the culture which they serve. We will be able to analyze and reevaluate the Lesbian experience; we also hope the existence of the Archives will encourage Lesbians to record their experiences in order to formulate our living herstory. We will collect and preserve any materials that are relevant to the lives and experiences of Lesbians: books, magazine, journals, news clippings (from establishment, Feminist or lesbian media), bibliographies, photos, historical information, tapes, films, diaries, oral histories, poetry and prose, biographies, autobiographies, notices of events, posters, graphics and other memorabilia. Ms. Hampton was a part of the Unity Fellowship Church movement.

*Principles:*

- All Lesbian women must have access to the Archives; no academic, political, or sexual credentials will be required for use of the collection; race and class must be no barrier for use or inclusion.
- The Archives shall be housed within the community, not on an academic campus that is by definition closed to many women.
- The Archives shall be involved in the political struggles of all Lesbians.
- Archival skills shall be taught, one generation of Lesbians to another, breaking the elitism of traditional archives.
- The community should share in the work of the Archives.
- Funding shall be sought from within the communities the Archives serves, rather than from outside sources.
- The community should share in the work of the Archives.
- The Archives will always have a caretaker living in it so that it will always be someone's home rather than an institution.
- The Archives will never be sold nor will its contents be divided.

In 1984 Mabel Hampton addressed the crowds at New York City's pride parade. She said, "I, Mabel Hampton, have been a lesbian all my life, for 82 years, and I am proud of myself and my people. I would like all my people to be free in this country and all over the world, my gay people and my black people." Mabel Hampton talking about her butch identity, "I never considered myself being a man. I never liked the men that much. And anything I don't like, I don't take up."

Wanda Renita Alston of Washington, D.C., was born April 7, 1959 in Newport News, Virginia. In the late 1990s and until her death, Alston served the District government, first as a census organizer; then as a Special Assistant to Mayor Anthony Williams for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Affairs. Alston was active in Democratic Party politics. In 2000, she served as a District of Columbia delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. In 2004, she was the party whip for DC delegates at the Democrats' convention in Boston. Alston also worked as a political consultant and as an event organizer with the Human Rights Campaign Fund. Alston wrote, "I can't stop fighting racism, because no matter how old I get I'm still going to be black. I can't stop fighting [sexism] because no matter how old I get I'm still going to be a woman. I can't stop fighting some of the other 'isms' I see because I can't change those things. I'm going to change the culture, and begin to work with people who want to change the culture." Alston was a member of Unity Church of Washington, D.C., on Capitol Hill.

Margaret Sloan-Hunter was a Black feminist, lesbian, civil rights advocate, and one of the founding editors of Ms. Magazine. "Ms. Sloan-Hunter was born in Chattanooga, TN., and grew up in Chicago, IL. When she was 14, she joined the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a group that worked on poverty and urban issues on behalf of the African-American community in Chicago. At age 17, she founded the Junior Catholic Inter-Racial Council, a mix of suburban and inner-city students who talked about and worked on racial problems. In 1966, Sloan-Hunter worked with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and in the Open Housing Marches. In 1973, she founded the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), which tackled



some of the same race and feminist issues. In 1975, she and her daughter moved to Oakland, California, where they established the Women's Foundation. Ms. Sloan-Hunter also helped organize the Berkeley Women's Center and the Feminist School for Girls. In Ms. Sloan-Hunter's published book of poetry *Black & Lavender* she writes, "I'm not black Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and a woman Thursday, Friday and Saturday." We women are the best thing going. We are warm, passionate, we cry and we live! Let's celebrate".

June Jordan was born in Harlem, New York to Jamaican immigrant parents. The Jordan's belonged to the Episcopal Church. Jordan completed the last three years of high school at Northfield School for Girls, a religious preparatory school in Massachusetts. Jordan enrolled at Barnard College, met Columbia University student, Michael Meyer, and they were married in 1955. The couple had one son, Christopher, and then got divorced in 1966. Jordan's first published book, *Who Look at Me*, appeared in 1969, and was a collection of poems for children. 27 more books followed in her lifetime, one (*Some of Us Did Not Die, Collected and New Essays*) was in press when she died. Two more have been published posthumously: *Directed By Desire: The Collected Poems of June Jordan* (2005) and a re-issue of the 1970 poetry collection, *SoulScript*, edited by June Jordan. Her autobiographical *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood*, came out in 2000. She was also an essayist, columnist for *The Progressive*, novelist, biographer, and librettist for the musical/opera *I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky*, composed by John Adams and produced by Peter Sellars. Jordan's teaching career began in 1967 at the City College of New York. She founded Poetry for the People at the University of California, Berkeley. She was a full professor in the departments of English, Women

Studies, and African American Studies. She also taught at Yale University”. June Jordan from the *Progressive*, “If you are free, you are not predictable and you are not controllable. To my mind, that is the keenly positive, politicizing significance of bisexual affirmation... to insist upon the equal validity of all of the components of social/sexual complexity”.

Christine Adams Tripp’s reflects on the beginnings of the Unity Fellowship Church, “I got this divine inspiration to create a place for gays and lesbians to go where they could learn that God loves them as they are and to develop their spiritual consciousness. As I was working on this, in 1984, I met the Reverend Carl Bean and he too was interested in doing the same.”

Pat Parker was born in Houston, Texas, on January 20, 1944. She was the youngest of four daughters in a Black working class family. Parker was urged by her father to take ‘the freedom train of education’. Parker later emigrated to Oakland, California, in the early 1970s to pursue work, writing and opportunities for activism. Working from 1978 to 1987 as medical coordinator at the Oakland Feminist Women’s Health Center, which grew from one clinic to six sites during her tenure. Parker also participated in political activism ranging from early involvement with the Black Panther Party and Black Women’s Revolutionary Council to formation of the Women’s Press Collective to wide-ranging activism in gay and lesbian organizations and positions of national leadership regarding women’s health issues, especially concerning domestic and sexual violence. Parkers’ observation on being gay and black, “If I could take all my parts with me when I go somewhere, and not have to say to one of them, ‘No, you stay home tonight, you won’t be welcome, because I’m going to an all-white party where I can

be gay, but not Black. Or I'm going to a Black poetry reading, and half the poets are anti-homosexual or thousands of situations where something of what I am cannot come with me. The day all the different parts of me can come along, we would have what I would call a revolution”.

Alberta Hunter was an American blues singer, songwriter, and nurse. Ms. Hunter's career started in the early 1920's. Hunter performed in church choirs, initially at her mother's place of worship. Hunter was a successful jazz and blues recording artist, who was critically acclaimed by those in the industry to the ranks of Ethel Waters and Bessie Smith. In the 1950's Hunter retired from performing and entered the medical field. She resumed singing in her eighties. Hunter was married briefly, but never consummated the union, using the excuse “that she didn't want to have sex in the same house where her mother lived.” Hunter met Lottie Taylor, the niece of the famous African-American entertainer Bert Williams soon afterwards, it is reported that the two became lovers.

Lorraine Hansberry was born in Chicago, Illinois. Ms. Hansberry was the youngest of four children of Carl A. Hansberry, a prominent real estate broker, and Nanny Perry Hansberry. Hansberry grew up on the south side of Chicago in the Woodlawn neighborhood, and attended church regularly with her family. The family then moved into an all-white neighborhood, where they faced racial discrimination. Hansberry attended a predominantly white public school while her parents fought against segregation. Hansberry's father engaged in a legal battle against a racially restrictive covenant that attempted to prohibit African-American families from buying homes in the area. The legal struggle over their move led to the landmark Supreme Court case of *Hansberry v. Lee*, 311 U.S. 32 (1940). Though victors in the Supreme Court,

Hansberry's family was subjected to what Hansberry would later describe as a 'hellishly hostile white neighborhood.' This experience later inspired her to write her most famous work, *A Raisin in the Sun*." Hansberry suggests that "Race, racism, is a device. No more. No less. It explains nothing at all. . . . I am simply saying that a device is a device, but that it also has consequences: once invented it takes on a life, a reality of its own. So in one century, men invoke the device of religion to cloak their conquests. In another, race. Now, in both cases you and I may recognize the fraudulence of the device, but the fact remains that a man who has a sword run through him because he refused to become a Moslem or a Christian, or who is shot in Zatembe, or Mississippi because he is black, is suffering the utter reality of the device. And it is pointless to pretend that it doesn't exist merely because it is a lie!"

Gladys Bentley was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the daughter of American George L. Bentley and his wife, a Trinidadian, Mary Mote. "Ms. Bentley appeared at Harry Hansberry's 'Clam House' on 133rd Street, one of New York City's most notorious gay speakeasies, in the 1920s, and headlined in the early thirties at Harlem's Ubangi Club, where she was backed up by a chorus line of drag queens. She was a 250 pound woman dressed in men's clothes, including a signature tuxedo and top hat. Bentley played a mean piano and sang her own raunchy lyrics to popular tunes of the day in a deep, growling voice while flirting outrageously with women in the audience." According to Bentley, "It seems I was born different. At least, I always thought so....From the time I can remember anything, even as I was toddling, I never wanted a man to touch me...Soon I began to feel more comfortable in boys clothes than in dresses." Lois Sobel, a popular columnist of the era, recalled Bentley's announcement of her

marriage ceremony with her white female lover in New Jersey. “Bentley briefly parlayed her fortunes into a Park Avenue apartment, servants, beautiful car etc. etc. In the 1930s the repeal of Prohibition quickly eroded the prominence of Harlem bistros. Furthermore, the Great Depression seems to have ended much of the ‘anything goes’ spirit of tolerance that had pervaded in the 1920s’. Despite this, initially Bentley was able to hold on by cultivating her homosexual following. Bentley, who for so long had been one of the most open as regards to her homosexuality, was of course a sitting duck for persecution. Out of desperate fear for her own survival, particularly with an aging mother to support, Gladys Bentley started wearing dresses, and sanitizing her act.” In 1950, Bentley wrote a desperate, largely fabricated article for Ebony magazine entitled *I am Woman Again* in which she claimed to have “cured her lesbianism via female hormone treatments and was finally at peace after a hell as terrible as dope addiction.” Ms. Bentley became an active and devoted member of ‘The Temple of Love in Christ, Inc.’ and was about to become an ordained minister in the church when she died of a flu epidemic in 1960 at the age of 52.

On January 14, 2008, the city of Cambridge, Massachusetts, made history after the city council chose Denise Simmons to serve as the first black lesbian mayor in the United States. The Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, which campaigns to increase the number of LGBT elected officials, said: “We are enormously proud of Mayor Simmons. Like Mayor Ken Reeves before her, she is among our community's trailblazers. Today is a day to celebrate another broken glass ceiling.” Simmons is of the opinion that ideology, not skin color, is the source of whatever conflict may exist. Simmons states, “Because we’re in Cambridge, being gay is not an issue. You can focus on policy issues that are meaningful to all people ... regardless of our gender and who we choose to love. I think

it's more along the lines of fundamentalist Christian-types [opposed to] non-fundamentalist Christian types, and some of the fundamental Christian types happen to be African-American.”

Research indicates that famous African-American lesbians grappled with coming out, giving thought to whether it was safe to come out or not, a few of them at one time or another even recanted their lesbianism. Some were at a point in life where they were tired of having to pretend to be somebody they were not, and decided to come out. Famous African-American lesbians struggled with their emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being, in relation to relationships with their partners, family and acceptance in the African-American community and church, similar to their non-famous African-American lesbian counterparts.

## **Lesbian and Gay Christian Congregations in the United States**

The Unity Fellowship of Christ Church is a church for gay African-Americans, where African-Americans can express themselves collectively and individually in a cultural way that is different than services at predominantly white churches. The one fact that was consistently revealed to Rev. Carl Bean, founder of Unity Fellowship of Christ Church is that nothing compares with, equals or surpasses love. “We are the very essence of Love as is all creation regardless of race, creed, color, religious affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, class, whether animal, fish, plant life, planets, galaxies known or unknown. There is no place in creation where love is not present.” Rev. Antonio Jones, pastor of Unity Fellowship of Christ Church, in Atlanta, Georgia says that, “African-American GLBT people had no place to go that looked like the churches they came from and enjoyed. They could either come out and leave the church as a whole or stay in the closet.” Unity Fellowship averages between seventy to ninety congregants each Sunday service and membership is mostly African-Americans LGBT’s.

Covenant Baptist Church is a gay-affirming church with a history of reaching out to Washington, D.C.'s sizeable African-American gay, lesbian, and transgender community. The vision statement of Covenant Baptist Church is, “Affirming our African heritage, our vision is to build an inclusive body of biblical believers who continue to grow in Christ as we love, serve, and fellowship with the community and each other.” Covenant Baptist Church works with the Human Rights Campaign, a gay rights organization, on outreach to black churches and is the only Baptist church listed with the city's Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Affairs as being welcoming to

homosexuals. Although Pastor Wiley faces opposition, he speaks out against discrimination towards the African-American LGBT community. Wiley states he is being called by God to preach acceptance of gays as part of the social justice agenda long embraced by black churches. “We, as African-Americans, should be the last people in the world, based on our history, to turn around and oppress others.”

This analysis reveals that embracing gays into the congregation can come at a cost. Victory Church, a black mega church near Atlanta, Georgia, lost 2,500 members, which is about half of its congregation, after its pastor, the Rev. Kenneth L. Samuel, started preaching acceptance of gays several years ago. “I did not know that my theological view would be so negatively reacted to. Even now, we are ostracized and criticized throughout the city by pastors and religious people of all types, certainly within the black community.”

Rev. Yvette Flunder founded the City of Refuge United Church of Christ, in San Francisco, California. Flunder is a third generation preacher with roots in the Church of God in Christ. She received a Doctor of Ministry degree from San Francisco Theological Seminary, and was licensed in the Church of God in Christ. The City of Refuge United Church of Christ combines ‘gospel ministry’ with ‘social ministry’. “Through social ministry we will endeavor to integrate forgiveness for transgression with psycho-social and physical healing by meeting the profound social issues of our day with a liberating Gospel of restoration which affirms ethnic, political, social and individual diversity.” The church serves an inner-city congregation that preaches and celebrates the message of the inclusive love of Jesus Christ. We Lift up Jesus *"...If I be lifted up...I'll draw all*



*people unto me.*” The statement of faith states that the “City of Refuge United Church of Christ is a ministry of restoration. We are intentionally radically inclusive, welcoming all persons regardless of race, color, ancestry, age, gender, affectional orientation, and those who are specially abled. We celebrate the Creator's diversity! We worship Christ!” The First Congregational Church of Fort Lauderdale United Church of Christ purpose is “To develop passionate followers of Christ through the celebration of worship, the excitement of God's Word, the rewards of service, and the joy of fellowship, where all are welcome at His table. The church advertises as “a welcoming, open and affirming church to all people of all races, genders, ages, sexual orientations, professions, previous religious affiliations, nationalities, or mental and physical conditions.”

The Sunshine Cathedral Metropolitan Community Church, located in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Statement of Faith is “Christianity is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and is the religion set forth in the scriptures. Jesus Christ is foretold in the Old Testament, presented in the New Testament, and proclaimed by the Christian Church in every age and in every land. Founded in the interest of offering a church home to all who confess and believe Metropolitan Community Churches’ moves in the mainstream of Christianity. Our faith is based upon the principles outlined in the historic creeds: Apostles and Nicene.” *Our Affirmation* “Grateful for infinite possibilities and mindful of our enormous potential and noble purpose, I dare to affirm greatness for Sunshine Cathedral. We are a bright light for the human family and we are limited only by the size of our dreams. When we dream big and summon the courage to make a total commitment to those dreams, all things are possible. With love and appreciation I bless my Sunshine Cathedral where we are truly seekers and students of Truth, empowered by Spirit, sharing

the Light with the World. And so it is!” We begin our worship by saying, “Here at the Sunshine Cathedral we are seekers and students of truth, empowered by Spirit, sharing the Light with the world.”

First Metropolitan Community Church was founded for gay men and lesbians in the Atlanta, Georgia area. The church congregation is predominantly white but with the recent hiring of African-American evangelist Franc Perry, the church is striving to diversify and build bridges with the black community, both gay and straight, according to Rev. Paul Graetz, First MCC senior pastor. “Racism is still evident but I’m excited about the movements being made. I’ve never seen it quite like this. It’s crazy that as gay people we seek acceptance but then don’t want to accept others.”

Rev. Chris Glaser, interim pastor of Christ Covenant Metropolitan Community Church, said racism among gay people must be directly attacked from the pulpit. “I mention African-American issues often from the pulpit because I think that, just as LGBT people often don’t attend churches that voice our concerns, African Americans may feel unwelcome when not mentioned.”

This study found there are several African-American churches and religious organization within the seven major historic black denominations in the United States that are gay-inclusive. These churches and religious organizations appear to be dedicated to fostering a welcoming environment for all people, by sharing Christ’s love for all. The African-American LGBT churches offer their LGBT congregants an overabundance of love, value, acceptance, counseling, encouragement and support.

## **CHRISTIAN INTERVENTIONS FOR THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN LESBIAN**

*Ex-gay* is a term used in professional literature and by some reparative therapists, religious groups, and others to describe “persons who used to identify as gay or bisexual, but now do not.” Reparative therapy, conversion therapy, or sometimes called sexual reorientation therapy, refers to methods aimed at changing a person whose primary attraction is homosexual to a heterosexual attraction or eliminating or diminishing homosexual desires and behaviors. Inclusive in these techniques are behavior modification, aversion therapy, psychoanalysis, prayer, and religious counseling. Reparative therapy or conversion therapy is closely associated with the ‘ex-gay’ movement, which is more explicitly religious. Reparative therapy uses the idea that homosexuality can, and should, be cured. For the purpose of this paper, the term ex-gay refers to an individual who experiences same-gender sexual attraction but who has changed or desires to modify sexual arousal due to religious motivation.

Veteran ‘ex-gay’ leader Frank Worthen says, “We do not attempt to make heterosexuals out of homosexuals. Rather, we attempt to change a person's identity, the way a person looks at himself. We encourage the former gay to drop the label homosexual from his life. However, we do not ask him to become dishonest about his struggle with homosexuality. He is a Christian who has a homosexual problem, rather than a homosexual who believes in Christ Jesus.”

## Ex-Gay Therapy

Exodus International has been in existence over for thirty years. The organization proposes to offer ‘hope and help’ to people seeking freedom from homosexuality. When it was introduced to professional literature in 1980, Pattison defined ex-gay as someone who had “experienced a basic change in sexual orientation from exclusive homosexuality to exclusive heterosexuality. Exodus describes change as “attaining abstinence from homosexual behaviors, lessening of homosexual temptations, strengthening their sense of masculine or feminine identity, correcting distorted styles of relating with members of the same and opposite gender.” Exodus is a nonprofit, interdenominational Christian organization promoting the message of ‘*Freedom from homosexuality through the power of Jesus Christ*’. Exodus is the largest Christian referral and information network dealing with homosexual issues in the world. The mission statement of Exodus is, “Mobilizing the body of Christ to minister grace and truth to a world impacted by homosexuality.”

Alan Chambers directs Exodus International. The Florida-based group was inspired nearly 30 years ago in Anaheim by charismatic Christian leaders who declared homosexuality a sin. It is reported that “the two men who helped get the movement started were counseling gays to go straight when, lo and behold, they fell in love with each other. ... The two men dumped their wives, abandoned Exodus, and wore each other’s wedding bands. ...” With years of ex-gay therapy Chambers said, “He has mostly conquered his own attraction to men, he still struggles at times with homosexual temptation. By no means would ‘we’ ever say change can be sudden or complete.”

‘Love Won Out’ is an ex-gay ministry that was launched by Focus on the Family in 1998, under the direction of James Dobson. ‘Love Won Out’, says its purpose is to equip and exhort Christian churches to respond in a ‘Christ-like’ way to homosexuality from what it calls the ‘biblical point of view.’ The ministry of ‘Love Won Out’ purports to help men and women dissatisfy “the (non-biological) condition of male and female homosexuality,” and to help the person “understand that same-sex attractions can be overcome.” It is the opinion of Love Won Out that, “The foundation of society for the family is marriage of a man and a woman for life...Scripture is very clear in its condemnation of homosexual conduct, for such sin is a deviation from God's creation and design.”

The American Psychiatric Association issued a statement backed by numerous other mainstream medical organizations, which stated: “There is simply no sufficiently scientifically sound evidence that sexual orientation can be changed.” The statement went on to say that positions espoused by ex-gay organizations “are not supported by the science” and that they “create an environment in which prejudice and discrimination can flourish.” Ex-gay groups assert that “the scientific community has taken its stances on homosexuality due to political, and not scientific, considerations.”

Melissa Fryrear, a self-described ex-lesbian, discusses her restoration with Exodus, “During my years of restoration, I also began to learn about this thing called womanhood. Goodness! Who knew there was so much to learn: plucking eyebrows, hair bleaches, hair waxing, facial mud masks, eyelash curlers, manicures, pedicures, push-up bras, tummy tuckers, rear-end boosters, last year’s colors, and next year’s fashions? I also began to

learn about boys. Let me say that if anyone thinks puberty is tough at fifteen, try it in your thirties!”

Janet Boynes, an African-American lesbian who attended an Exodus International Conference in 2005, says, “After attending Exodus International’s conference on homosexuality this past summer, I was greatly encouraged by their ministry and look forward to working with them to reach the African-American community. My message and my heart will continue to be for helping those struggling with homosexuality by bringing the church together across racial lines to minister to the hurting in love. I truly believe that what God has done in my life, He can also do in the lives of everyone who calls on His name.

Positive Alternatives to Homosexuality (P.A.T.H.) has twelve signatory organizations. PATH is a non-profit coalition of organizations that help people with unwanted same-sex attractions (SSA) realize their personal goals for change, whether by developing their innate heterosexual potential or by embracing a lifestyle as a single, non-sexually active man or woman.

- COURAGE, an apostolate of the Roman Catholic Church, ministers to those with same-sex attractions and their loved ones.
- EVERGREEN INTERNATIONAL is an educational, information, and resource organization for individuals who wish to overcome homosexual behaviors and diminish unwanted same-sex attractions.
- THE GERMAN INSTITUTE FOR YOUTH AND SOCIETY is a research and informational organization that investigates and evaluates social developments and seeks to develop workable strategies for the future in the areas of areas of

family life, marriage and family, gender studies, sexuality, homosexuality, human rights and media.

- **HOMOSEXUALS ANONYMOUS** began in Reading, PA in 1980 by two ex-gays, Colin Cook and Doug McIntire, and follows a 14 step- principle.
- **THE INTERNATIONAL HEALING FOUNDATION (IHF)** is a therapeutic organization established to educate and counsel men, women and adolescents about the causes and healing of homosexuality.
- **JEWS OFFERING NEW ALTERNATIVES TO HOMOSEXUALITY (JONAH)**, an international non-profit organization headquartered in New Jersey, educates the world-wide Jewish community about the prevention, intervention, and healing of the underlying issues causing same-sex attraction.
- **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH & THERAPY OF HOMOSEXUALITY (NARTH)** respects and understands that all individuals have the right to choose their own destiny.
- **ONEBYONE** is a ministry created in 1995 by Presbyterian pastors and lay leaders throughout the United States to educate and equip the church to effectively minister to those who are in conflict with their sexuality
- **PARENTS AND FRIENDS OF EX-GAYS AND GAYS (PFOX)** is a national organization that supports families affected by homosexuality, advocates for the ex-gay community, and educates the public on sexual reorientation.
- **PEOPLE CAN CHANGE** is a non-profit organization that provides information, training and support for men.

- TRUE FREEDOM TRUST is a Christian support and teaching ministry for men and women in the United Kingdom, who accept the Bible's prohibition of homosexual practice and yet are aware of homosexual tendencies, or struggle with other sexual and relational issues
- POWERFUL CHANGE MINISTRY GROUP is a national fellowship of 11 Christian African-American led ministries whose goal is to advocate change for same-sex strugglers among people of color. Powerful Change Ministry Group believes that the choice to change is a fundamental message of the Bible. Powerful Change Ministry Group members work diligently to raise awareness in the Black community on the need for holistic ministry to affected individuals as well as their families. Under the umbrella of Powerful Change Ministry Group is Witness Freedom Ministries, founded in 1996, by Pastor Daryl L. Foster, Atlanta, Georgia. Witness Freedom Ministries appears to be at the forefront of public outreach to men and women of color who struggle against same sex attractions. The outreach ministry has become known worldwide for its passion to minister to men and women trapped in unwanted homosexuality. Witness Freedom Ministries is founded upon five principles, namely: faith, mission, ministry, discipleship and freedom. According to Witness Freedom Ministry Group, “The secret to a lifestyle of deliverance begins with submission to Jesus Christ Jesus Christ and His living word. Only then can the long journey to spiritual and sexual maturity come to fruition in your life. We believe that God is still a deliverer, still a healer and still a heart fixer. He has the same solutions for any problems and no one is beyond His reach. That's what we believe and preach as witnesses of His



radical, life changing power!” The Mission Statement of Witness Freedom Ministry Group is, “WITNESS! Exists to bring alive the message of freedom from homosexuality through the power of the Lord Jesus Christ by exalting a dynamic profile of the grace of God. Our aim is to purposefully create a community of overcomers who are not ashamed of God's deliverance. WITNESS! Unapologetically seeks to evangelize, equip and educate, impact and influence.” The ministry objectives of Witness Freedom Ministry Group are to reach homosexuals by:

- Aggressive outreach evangelism and support to African-American Christian same-sex attraction strugglers.
- Discipleship Programs
- Maximizing online evangelistic opportunities
- Production of outreach literature
- Intercessory prayer
- Providing fellowship, guidance and nurturing support for believers in all stages of overcoming by:
  - Encouraging submission to Christ and His Word
  - Encouraging accountability at a Bible-practicing church
  - Personal, spiritual and practical discipline
  - Encouraging spiritual activism/evangelism within the local church.

Heighten awareness in the Body of Christ as to the need for compassionate, holistic ministry to affected persons by:

- Teaching seminars, workshops and conferences

- Collecting and presenting the largest contingent of testimonies by former homosexuals of African descent anywhere on the world wide web as evidence of the power of the Lord Jesus.
- Identifying covenant pastors and churches in the black community who understand and openly welcome ministry to the sexually broken.
- Intercessory prayer and advocacy for family and friends of homosexuals.
- Establishing a credible network African American led ministries, giving people of color the choice to change.
- Secure consistent funding to operate programs, assist in outreach efforts both locally and nationally and purchase office space for the ministry.

Consistently challenge and confront through public exposure any progression of openly unrepentant homosexuals and their allies within the black church structure by:

- Monitor and report on the incidences of false teaching, open acceptance of homosexuality.
- Oppose individuals and organizations who deny traditional Christian teaching on human sexuality and morality standards in favor of doctrines promoting sensuality and sexuality.

Freedom Ministry Group believes that the ‘alpha’ of the journey which eventually culminates in the ‘omega’ is a process encompassing the following:

1. Cleansing the soul
2. Liberating the body
3. Transforming the mind
4. Putting on immortality

According to Witness Freedom Ministry Group, “There is a widespread assumption among pro-homosexual theologians that Jesus never said anything about homosexuality in his teachings. Time and time again, like a broken record, unsuspecting gays blindly repeat ‘Jesus never once said anything about homosexuality.’” This type of compartmentalization of the Bible serves these religious pundits in two ways:

1. It bolsters the erroneous and illogical argument that silence equals consent.
2. If Jesus didn't have a problem with gays, then why should anyone else?”

Witness Freedom Ministry Group states that, “The attempts of misguided sexual politics of such theologians to divorce Jesus as a singular operative from God or the Bible fall way short of true biblical interpretation. Any simple study of the scripture will show that Jesus is God (1John 4:23), Jesus is the Word (logos) made flesh (John 1:14) and ALL scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Tim 3:16). There can be no separation of the critical and fundamental truths when determining the veracity of Biblical teaching.”

In reference to the Fundamentalist African-American Christians being obsessed with homosexuality Witness Freedom Ministry Group express that “Fundamentalist African-American Christians who believe that homosexuality is destructive to the continuation of the family and the social structure have a constitutional and biblical right to express such views as openly as they choose.” Finally, Witness Freedom Ministry Group affirms that there must be a reorientation process that occurs for that same-sex attraction to be abated. “Homosexual orientation is cemented when the mind and body are constantly subjected to same gender impulses. If you spend a great portion of your life being emotionally and physically acclimatized to same gender sexuality, then the intense difficulty in relating in such a way to the opposite sex is understandable. This is why reorientation must occur. In

other words, the Holy Spirit will help you to reverse the process over a period of time. Herein lays the power of scriptural application. Be ye transformed (reoriented) by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God.”

Ex- Gay Therapy, Conversion Therapy, or Reparative Therapy is the formal attempt to change a person's sexual orientation, typically from homosexuality to heterosexuality, or to convince or attempt to ‘reprogram’ the homosexual to stop engaging in same-sex behavior. Aversion Therapy has been used in attempts to convert homosexuals to heterosexuality. Let it be noted that aversion therapy is no longer a common practice, although it is still sometimes used. Since 1994, the American Psychological Association has declared that “aversion therapy is a dangerous practice that does not work.” Since 2006, the use of aversion therapy to treat homosexuality has been in violation of the codes of conduct and professional guidelines of the American Psychological Association and American Psychiatric Association.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, “Clinical experience suggests that any person who seeks conversion therapy may be doing so because of social bias that has resulted in internalized homophobia, and that gay men and lesbians who have accepted their sexual orientation positively are better adjusted than those who have not done so.” Most studies suggest that one’s sexual orientation is more innate than chosen and is set at a very young age, perhaps before birth. It is likely that transsexual feelings of being born into the wrong sex are also either innate or established at a very early age. A growing number of studies suggest that sexual orientation is at least partly, if not

largely, determined by genetic or other prenatal factors, with the strongest evidence for that in males.

## CONCLUSION

To answer the question is the religious experience a critical component to the identity of the African-American lesbian; this research has found it to be so. To understand the importance of the religious experience to the identity of the African-American lesbian one just has to look at the history of the Fundamentalist African-American church. According to Dr. Jeremiah Wright, The black religious experience is a tradition that at one point in American history was actually called 'the invisible institution,' as the Black Codes forced it underground. The Black Codes prohibited the gathering of more than two black people without a white person being present Africans did not stop worshipping because of the Black Codes. Africans did not stop gathering for inspiration, information, and encouragement. They continued to gather for hope in the midst of discouraging and seemingly hopeless circumstances. "They became, in other words, invisible in and invisible to the eyes of the dominant culture."

What is interesting to note is that the African-American lesbian subjects themselves to this same type of invisibility by attending traditional Fundamentalist African-American churches due in part to the fact that these churches represent the center of African- American life, where spiritual guidance is offered, as well as a sense of equality among peers. The Fundamentalist African-American church is for the African-American lesbian a double-edged sword. It offers a comfort zone where no one has to feel inferior, yet forces the African-American lesbian to live in silence regarding their sexual orientation, causing the African-American lesbian to feel unworthy of Jesus Christ's love and what is offered through His salvation.

James Baldwin speaks of his experience as a minister in *The Fire Next Time*, “Nothing that has happened to me since equals the power and the glory that I sometimes felt when, in the middle of a sermon, I knew that I was somehow, by some miracle, really carrying, as they said, ‘the Word’, when the church and I were one. Their pain and their joy were mine, and mine were theirs—they surrendered their pain and joy to me, I surrendered mine to them—and their cries of ‘Amen!’ and ‘Hallelujah!’ and ‘Yes, Lord!’ and ‘Praise His Name!’ and ‘Preach it brother!’ sustained and whipped on my solos until we all became equal, wringing wet, singing and dancing, in anguish and rejoicing, at the foot of the altar”. This oneness, the sharing of pain, joy, and sorrow appears tantamount for the African-American lesbian who attends a Fundamentalist African-American church.

Can an African American lesbian reconcile their own sexual orientation with their religion? This analysis concludes that the African-American who remains within the African-American Fundamentalist church and continues to openly practice a gay lifestyle will be ostracized, ridiculed and sometimes asked to resign as a member of the congregation. If the African-American lesbian worships within her Fundamentalist African-American church, it may mean staying in her church of a lifetime, but finding ways to accept, or overlook the homophobic teachings with which they disagree. Sometimes the African-American lesbian must decamp for a church more fitting to their current faith due to disagreement over church teachings. It is noted that sometimes the African-American lesbian wishes to stay with the family, the songs and prayers of a lifetime or a familiar road to the divine, because they have hope for change, even if it is not apparent in their own lifetime. The African-American lesbian who remains loyal to

the Fundamentalist African- American church may question if they should leave their church, has their church left them, or is their church a place where she can find God at all due to the homophobic teaching and non-inclusiveness of all people. Ephesians 1:6 says, “We believe that for the child of God under grace every aspect of the law is now done away. Under grace we as believers have been delivered from the burden of a covenant of works, we are not now striving to be accepted, but rather are free to live as people who are accepted in Christ”. John described best God's open invitation in John 3:16 when he wrote that ‘whosoever’ (King James translation) believes in Jesus Christ will not perish. ‘Whosoever’ is all-inclusive and does not exclude anyone. Simply put, it does not matter if you gay or straight, black or white, male or female. What matters is whether you believe in Jesus Christ or not and have accepted Him as your Lord and Savior. If one believes that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16, then it follows that no one is excluded from God's invitation. Paul said in Romans 8:1, ‘Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’. If there was a sin that could keep us from being saved, the text would have instead read, Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus except for the homosexuals. If the African-American lesbian remains within the confines of the African-American Fundamentalist Church, she may perhaps have great difficulty in reconciling her own sexual orientation within her religion.



It is the findings of this research that the risk factor of losing family, friends and church family for the openly gay African-American lesbian appears to pose a real and imminent threat to all she holds of value. The social ethicist Peter Paris makes a proposal that there is a communality of what the religious and moral discourse is and it is based on the African worldview or African proverb, "*I am because we are.*" According to Mr. Paris, the individual only exists due to the three African cosmological and societal thoughts of spirit, tribe, and family. "*I am*" because the Supreme Being exists and the ancestors continue to exist in the spiritual realm, therefore, it is because of them I am. "*I am*" because of the inter-relatedness of my ethnic and cultural heritage to my tribe. "*I am*" because I exhibit behaviors and patterns normative to the community to which I am a part of. "*I am*" because of the blood ties I have with and to my family. This Africentric worldview is reciprocal and communal, thus, making it circular not lineal. Moreover, "we are because I am". The "we" cannot continue to exist if the "I" as an individual, does not uphold the rites, tradition, and value system of the spirit, ancestors, tribe, and family. It appears obligatory that the virtues the African-American exhibits, is for the good of the community and not the individual. The preservation and the enhancement of the "we" precede the "I." Using this reasoning, the "I" is the community, and the African-American lesbian is in risk of losing family, and friends if she strays from the basic premise of 'we' first. The individual (the African-American lesbian) and their actions affect the family, tribe, and spirit. "*I am because we are*" is the common thread.

To family and friends, the African-American lesbian may appear to be involved with sin, or engaging in sinful acts. The African-American Fundamentalist church may teach the family and friends of the African-American lesbian that they should avoid

contact with their African-American lesbian friend or family member because they are sinful, further alienating the African-American lesbian. Research shows that some family members and friends may believe that they are acting out of concern and moral belief, and may try to make their loved one change. Strangely enough the primary source of comfort and oneness for most African-American lesbians, the church, has historically been unsupportive of African-American lesbians who identify that they are struggling with their homosexuality. Many African-American lesbians become emotionally agonized by the conflict between the keeping the respect, and love of their family and friends, or losing that love and respect by telling their family and friends that they are a lesbian.

This research has not found any consistent, evidence that ex-gay therapy for the African-American lesbian has had any long-term effect for the required change purported. Exodus can describe 38 percent of its programs' participants as successes, changing to either a 'meaningful but complicated' heterosexuality (15 percent) or a stable chastity (23 percent). Jones and Yarhouse take pains to emphasize that their study of Exodus does not clarify the likelihood of successful change for any particular individual, and that participants were self-selected, a highly motivated, and a highly religious group working with Exodus.

The ethics guidelines of major U.S. mental health organizations vary from cautionary statements about the safety, effectiveness, and dangers of prejudice associated with conversion therapy. The American Psychological Association recommends that ethical practitioners refrain from using conversion therapy (ex-gay therapy), or referring patients to others who do. The American Psychological Association however respects the client's right

to self-determination. As a result of the medical view, conversion therapy is a largely marginalized practice. Today's conversion therapists characterize the movement as offering the “possibility of a choice to people who are unhappy with their attraction to the same sex.”

This research found that some men and women in the African-American Fundamentalist church, who participated in ex-gay therapy, have been conditioned not to share their testimony of being delivered from homosexuality because some Fundamentalist African-American church intently views homosexuality as a powerful demonic spirit, and deliverance from homosexuality is viewed with much skepticism. It appears that this climate of unbelief has become an encircling trap for the African-American lesbian, which pushes the former African-American lesbian into isolation concerning their ‘deliverance’. Research shows that the African-American lesbian may face further discrimination and ridicule from their church when they come forth to proclaim their ‘deliverance’ from homosexuality. One could surmise that ‘deliverance’ from anything by God's power should be a cause to rejoice, but the refusal of the church to openly rejoice, embrace and proclaim the deliverance of its formerly homosexual members point to signs of carnal discrimination, instead of any spiritual leading. This research finds that there are two conflicting positions regarding homosexuality. The first position states that sexual orientation is determined by genetics. The second position state that sexual orientation is determined by social, or cultural processes. If homosexuality is due to genetic factors two things most likely will happen. Those who believe homosexuality is wrong will use this evidence to prove it a genetic disease, and use it as justification to seek a ‘cure,’ to isolate, and/or deny gay people general civil rights. Those who believe homosexuality is healthy and normal will use this evidence to

prove it is a part of normal human development, and use it as justification to prove it is normal, and/or ensure gay people have general civil rights.

It is the conclusion of this research analysis that the African- American lesbian finds herself *Standing in the Vestibule* of the Fundamentalist African-American church. It is her decision to choose between her spiritual conviction to obey Christ, and the rigors of participating either in a traditional, homophobic African-American congregation that denounces homosexuality, or reintegrating into a more modern, gay-friendly, inclusive love of Jesus Christ church that may, or may not be solely, African-American. The opportunities for African-American lesbians to worship together in an African-American openly gay church are limited and may not be located in the area where the African-American lesbian works, and lives. The increase in African-American people assuming overt gay lifestyles is largely confined to the African-American male. Despite an African-American male shortage due to wars, prison, drugs and premature death, relatively few African-American lesbians have joined the community of overt lesbians.

This research has found that the numbers are not true computations of overt African-American lesbians, and that the African-American lesbian is underrepresented, so it is difficult to assess the amount of African-American lesbians both in Fundamentalist African-American churches and in openly gay churches. Research shows that once the African-American lesbian becomes visible in most Fundamentalist African-American church, the African-American lesbian is condemned as a sinner in the eyes of the church. If the African-American lesbian is able to function without being attached to a gay organization, or involved in an ongoing consultation with a psychiatrist, she no doubt considers herself well off, and attending church may become secondary to her gay lifestyle. This research

concludes that the African-American community is still the 'ideological oppressor', to which the African-American lesbian is tragically forced to live in an 'unseen reality', not due to society at large but the African-American people who still struggle to maintain some semblance of preconceived unity.

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