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NBJC Media Highlights 2010-2011



ROLAND S. MARTIN

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY



TJMS: Sharon Lettman Says Gay And Lesbian Rights Need To Be Part Of The African-American Conversation

Roland Martin talks with Sharon Lettman, Executive Director of the National Black Justice Coalition about Proposition 8 being overturned.

Sharon Lettman said the next step in the fight for gay marriage is to make sure that the state of California fully resumes marriage equality. Lettman expressed that their opponents will take this fight to the next level of the courts and said, “This is going to be a national debate for years to come”.

Roland asks Lettman, what does she think the conversation will be in the Black community where same sex marriage is highly opposed? Lettman responded by saying, “The reality is marriage, the fluidity of the Black family, needs to be a conversation, period”. She also said, “What has to be recognized is that gay and lesbian rights as African-Americans needs to become an inclusive part of the African-American conversation”.

“Overall marriage equality can build stronger Black families. All of the rhetoric that is out there about gays and lesbians, about people not being honest and true [to] who they are; here we have a community, our community, my constituents that say we want to be whole”. Lettman said, “We want to be a whole part of society by being open and honest and telling you we are in committed relationships can only build safer, more aware and respectable unions within our community”.

<http://www.rolandmartin.com/blog/index.php/2010/08/05/roland-tjms-07-22-10-roland-s-martintom-joyner-morning-show-sharon-lettman-says-gay-and-lesbian-rights-need-to-be-part-of-the-african-american-conversation/>

NBJC in the MEDIA

As the leading civil rights organization dedicated to empowering Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC) developed a multi-channel approach to building a robust communications and new media division. NBJC revamped its media and outreach strategy for 2010 and beyond, and compiled select highlights of media coverage for 2010-2011 featured in this document.

Early success was evident by NBJC appearances and mentions on the “Tom Joyner Morning Show,” and original articles and commentary placed with the Huffington Post, The Root, MSNBC and other publications and outlets that previously had not given Black LGBT issues significant coverage. This year, NBJC benefitted from the unprecedented synergy around ESSENCE magazine’s four-page coverage on the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” in March 2011, Black Enterprise magazine’s eight-page cover story on workplace discrimination and challenges for Black LGBT people in “Corporate America” in July 2011, and EBONY magazine’s feature of a gay marriage debate and profiles of same-gender couples and their families in October 2011.

NBJC positioned itself to be the lead organization in mainstream Black America regarding LGBT equality issues, especially among Black media outlets. NBJC recognizes that the “LGBT Equality Movement” is at a tipping point. NBJC believes in representative leadership, building a presence, and displaying the leadership of Black LGBT people in the nation’s capital and across the country. NBJC intends to do all it can to demonstrate the talent and resources within the “Black LGBT Movement” to the African American civil rights community and Black mainstream community.

10 black women you should know TheGrio.com



Executive Director Sharon Lettman-Hicks profiled as a “woman you should know” on TheGrio.com



President Obama Signs “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” Repeal into Law (December 2010)

This photo was featured on www.WhiteHouse.gov after President Obama signed the DADT Repeal Act into law

NBJC Takes the Hill

Black LGBT organization readies for annual 'Out on the Hill'

By Will O'Bryan

Published on September 15, 2011, 2:17am | Comments

Following on an annual outing begun last year, the National Black Justice Coalition will be returning to Capitol Hill next year for "Out on the Hill," six days of meeting with legislators, discussing the issues, and otherwise advancing the mission of the "leading national Black LGBT civil rights organization focused on federal public policy."

Designed to coincide with the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Annual Legislative Conference, Out on the Hill runs Sept. 20 to 25.

"It is very important for LGBT activists to be known inside of the black leadership," says NBJC Executive Director Sharon Lettman-Hicks, under whose leadership Out on the Hill began. Oct. 1 marks her two-year anniversary leading NBJC. "We can't engage in a positive way if we're only talking to the choir. This is the intersection of racial justice and LGBT equality. It's important that the black community see black leadership as a stakeholder in the LGBT agenda."

Lettman-Hicks's mention of the racial justice-LGBT equality intersection is actually a crucial part of the 2011 Out on the Hill events. On Wednesday, Sept. 21, NBJC is partnering with Mayor Vincent Gray's Office of GLBT Affairs to present the Black LGBT National Town Hall Meeting. The theme? "The African American Community & The LGBT Community at the Intersection."

"We want to profile advances in the District of Columbia, which predominantly black, on LGBT issues," says Lettman-Hicks. "We are very blessed to have a great partnership growing with the LGBT office of the mayor. Talking about the passage of marriage in this predominantly black city, and the crime against people of color in the transgender community, those are going to be the two hot topics at our town-hall meeting."

Over the course of the six-day event, other topics will obviously enter the discussion. Stacey Long, federal legislative director at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the organization's principal lobbyist, also chairs Out on the Hill's public policy committee. Accordingly, she'll be instrumental in fostering conversations on a range of issues during the event, which will bring a cross section from across the country to the nation's capital.

"It's not every day you have black LGBT people talking with members of Congress, and many members of Congress want to hear from people firsthand, not from lobbyists," she says. "This is the time of year the organization is dedicated to making its presence known and lifting up those voice that may not have been engaged before."

For the full "Out on the Hill" schedule, to learn more, or to register, call NBJC at 202-319-1552 or visit nbjc.org.



**Sharon J.
Lettman-Hicks**

*Executive Director and CEO, National Black
Justice Coalition (NBJC)*

GET UPDATES FROM SHARON J. LETTMAN-HICKS



20

It Takes a Village: Standing with Our LGBT Youth

Posted: 10/27/11 01:43 PM ET



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When I first became the executive director of the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC), the nation's leading organization advocating for black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, I was often asked why I had chosen to accept the position. I am a straight woman who was raised in suburban Florida with a military husband from urban Detroit, Mich., a family with strong Christian values and an upbringing that included attending one of America's Historically Black College and Universities. At first, I was deeply focused on black churches and far-right activists' anti-gay rhetoric. Then I tried to engage people and share with them the stories of everyday people who couldn't find work or suffered from workplace discrimination because of their gender identity. Even worse were the horror stories of teenagers being attacked, bullied, and even murdered, because people suspected they were gay. This journey caused me to question how we, as a society, have come to define "community."

At NBJC, we work at the intersection of race, orientation and gender identity. Daily, we are standing in support, solidarity and commitment to building safe communities, families, schools, churches, and places of employment for everyone, inclusive of our LGBT brothers and sisters. And while it is incredibly rewarding to know that we are helping to make the world a better place for all people, the challenges of this work have resonated with me, as a wife, stepmother and advocate, deeply.

Together, my husband and I are helping to raise nieces, nephews, unofficially adopted sons and daughters we love and look after like our own. While we try our hardest to create a haven within our home for their many talents, quirks, and big personalities, we unleash them into the world hoping for the best. As adults we have come to know all too well the importance of creating safe spaces in our schools so that all our children can thrive. But how can our young people meet their full potential when they are being harassed, teased and rejected for who they are?

Just last month, NBJC, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) released data from *Injustice at Every Turn: A Look at Black Respondents in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, which found that half of the respondents who attend school expressing their transgender identity or gender non-conformity reported incidents of harassment. And it doesn't stop there.

HUFFPOST GAY VOICES

According to research from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), 85 percent of African-American LGBT students say they hear anti-gay language at school. Too often these same students don't even end up making it to school. About a quarter of those same students said they've missed class at least once or missed at least one full day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, compared to just 6.3 percent of all black youth and 3.5 percent of all white youth.

These alarming statistics and the very real faces behind them have led NBJC to join the "be a STAR" alliance, a coalition committed to creating a positive social environment for everyone regardless of age, race, religion, or orientation through education and awareness. In conjunction with the National Education Association Health Information Network, "be a STAR" has created an anti-harassment toolkit for students, teachers and parents to foster an environment in which tolerance and respect for all people is the norm.

Bullying and violence have no place in our schools. When our children are the targets as a result of their orientation, perceived orientation, gender identity or gender expression, it is critical that there are adults they can turn to. It is imperative that their allies be visible so that they won't have to be invisible. This is our responsibility to not only our black LGBT youth but every child.

It is going to take a village to change the culture of bullying. As adults, we have an obligation to help young people "own their power." If they are bullied or witness their friends being harassed, they should feel empowered to speak up and speak out. That's where we come in.

We must engage our children in open and honest dialogue around anti-gay violence and rhetoric and bring LGBT-inclusive books, movies, and conversations into the home. Start a Gay-Straight Alliance with your son or daughter if they don't already have one. And if there is one, you can volunteer, whether your child is gay or not. Being a silent spectator is not an option. It is about building community and letting our children know that we care.





Don't Ask Don't Tell Policy Officially Ends

A repeal of the controversial law means that gay members of the U.S. military are no longer forced to hide their sexuality.

By Naeesa Aziz

Posted: 09/20/2011 04:02 PM EDT

Gay service members may now openly state their sexual orientation after the repeal of a 1993 law allowing gays to serve only so long as they kept their sexual orientation private took effect Tuesday.

The repeal, signed by President Obama, puts an end to an 18-year policy that came into effect during the Clinton administration. Military officials announced that all necessary preparations were made in advance of the repeal and that the military is ready to step into a new era.

As of last week, 97 percent of the military had undergone training in the new law and applications from openly gay recruits, accepted for the past few weeks, will now be processed in light of the repeal. Also, the Defense Department will publish revised regulations to reflect the new law allowing gays to serve openly.

All pending investigations, discharges and other administrative proceedings that were begun under the

law will now come to a halt.

Black gay advocates say the repeal marks an even larger win for gay African-American service members as the group was being discharged at nearly three times the rate of their non-Black counterparts.

“This victory has been long overdue,” said National Black Justice Coalition Executive Director Sharon Lettman-Hicks. “This law was wrong when it was put in place back in 1993, and has negatively impacted the lives of thousands of service members, many of whom are Black lesbians.”

However, even amid the excitement of the repeal, there are still challenges. Officials say there will not be any immediate changes to eligibility standards for military benefits and entitlements, such as designating a partner as one's life insurance beneficiary or as designated caregiver in the Wounded Warrior program.

Black and Transgender: A Double Burden

By: Kellee Terrell

Posted: October 18, 2011 at 12:16 AM

“Can you imagine what it’s like to see people you work with refuse to walk on the same side of the street with you or sit with you at lunch, or to be told that you are unhirable, just because you are a transgender man?” asks Kylar Broadus, an African-American lawyer and board member of the National Black Justice Coalition, a national black LGBT civil rights organization based in Washington, D.C.

Broadus, who was born a woman and transitioned into a man 17 years ago, has been passed over for jobs because of his gender identity. “I’m basically unemployable because I can’t hide the transgender part of me. Most likely I am not getting hired once employers see that my Social Security card and school transcripts all have a female name,” he says. “I am a human being who deserves the right to make a living like everyone else.”

Broadus’ experiences are not rare. The harsh reality is that whether they possess a J.D. or a GED, members of the African-American transgender community face severe discrimination, according to the recent study *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (pdf). The survey, the first of its kind, was a collaboration between the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Black Justice Coalition. It collected data from more than 6,500 transgender Americans and found that all transgender people face severe bias ranging from housing and health care to education and employment.

But when researchers took a deeper look at the discrimination that the black respondents faced (pdf) -- all 381 of them -- the data jumped out at them. “What was really poignant were these stark differences. In every case, black respondents fared worse than the nonblack respondents in the national survey,” says Darlene Nipper, deputy executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. “This is because black transgender people face anti-transgender bias coupled with structural and institutionalized racism.”

The Greater Challenge of Being Black and Trans

Monica Roberts, a 49-year-old black transgender activist and founder of the award-winning blog *TransGriot*, wasn’t shocked by *Injustice at Every Turn*’s findings -- they reflect what advocates have been saying for years. “There is this saying that when white America has a cold, black America has a fever. Well, when black America has a fever, black transgender America has pneumonia.”

The employment-discrimination data alone support Roberts’ train of thought. Overall, black unemployment is at an all-time high at 16.7 percent, but 26 percent of black transgender people are unemployed -- that’s three times the rate of the general public and twice that of the rest of the transgender community. And while a crippling economy is a serious factor behind the statistics, it’s important to note that current laws -- in 35 states it’s perfectly legal to fire or not hire someone because he or she is transgender -- exacerbate these unemployment numbers.

Thirty-two percent of black transgender respondents have lost a job because of bias; 48 percent were not hired because of bias; 34 percent were living in extreme poverty, reporting a household income of less than \$10,000 a year; and almost 50 percent admitted to selling drugs or performing sex work in order to earn money to survive.

Unfortunately, these disparities don't stop at employment. The report also found that 20 percent of black respondents are HIV positive (the general black population's HIV prevalence rate is 2.4 percent); 21 percent of those who were attending school as transgender people had to leave because the harassment was so severe; 41 percent have been homeless in the past (five times the rate of the general U.S. population); 29 percent of those who had been in jail or prison reported being physically assaulted, and 32 percent reported being sexually assaulted; and 34 percent reported not seeking medical attention when injured or sick for fear of being discriminated against in health care settings.

A State of Despair

One of the most shocking findings was that nearly half of the black respondents reported having attempted suicide at least once in their lives -- this rate was higher than that of any other racial group in the survey.

Nipper states that the numbers speak volumes about the emotional and mental distress that members of the black trans community endure throughout their lives. "From cradle to the grave, black transgender people are experiencing high levels of abuse and harassment from all over -- their teachers, employers, the prison system, the health care system, you name it," she says. "And there are barely any safe places for them to go to deal with this stress."

Despite the devastating statistics, it's important to recognize that the very existence of such data is a victory of sorts because historically, reaching the transgender community -- especially people of color -- has been incredibly difficult for researchers. Even the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention falls short on specific data on transgender people. And despite acknowledging that this community has the highest HIV risk factors of any group, the CDC lumps transgender people into the same category as men who have sex with men. (In August the CDC stated that it is revising this approach.)

"We go underreported because we live in fear," says Broadus. "I remember first coming out in my community in Missouri, and there were people who came to see me speak who had literally locked themselves in their homes and never really came out because they were terrified of what would happen if they did."

Nipper adds that her organization understood this fear and created a grassroots approach in collecting the data. "We did a lot of outreach across the country. We worked with groups and allies, and we used online surveys and went to the bars and clubs to really reach the transgender community to participate in this survey."

Now advocates have the data they need to prove to lawmakers that this population needs better protection under the law. "We plan on taking this data and our recommendations and pushing for, among many things, a federal anti-discrimination employment bill," Nipper says.

So Why All The Hate?

Despite the increase in positive media coverage around LGBT issues -- and shows such as Glee, Modern Family and True Blood that raise the national consciousness around what it means to be gay or lesbian -- it's hard to

deny that transgender people, especially African Americans, are somewhat left out of that national conversation. (The most visible nonwhite transgender faces are Isis from America's Next Top Model and People.com editor Janet Mock.)

Broadus believes that such blatant omission only leads to more ignorance, sensationalism and hatred toward his community. "We find ourselves the butt of joke on The Jerry Springer Show or some sexual fetish in porn," he says. "We are rarely seen as authentic people."

Sharon J. Lettman, executive director of the National Black Justice Coalition, is confident that the report will be a wake-up call for what African Americans need to do as a community. "Our black transgender sisters and brothers are black people, too, and we have to love them better."

The good news is that there has been a surge in black transgender leadership over the years. Just this May, in conjunction with the National Black Justice Coalition, Broadus started the Trans People of Color Coalition as a means for transgender people to advocate for themselves. "This is an effort to build a movement," he says. "People are finding their power and realizing that they are worthy."

And while black transgender activism is important in changing the hearts and minds of straight America, it's also crucial in further educating the white and black lesbian, gay and bisexual community, especially the white-dominated LGBT movement, which for years has been accused of being racist, trans-phobic and AIDS-phobic.

Roberts believes that issues of respectability politics help explain why gay-friendlier causes such as marriage equality have sucked all the oxygen out of the LGBT movement and left little space for transgender issues and black LGBT folks across the board. "There is this illusion of community, and it's frustrating as hell," she says. "Historically, the transgender community has backed their rights, while they were stabbing us in the back when it was time to reciprocate. It was black trans folks who started the Dewey's lunch-counter sit-in [in Philadelphia in 1965], and it was trans women like Sylvia Rivera who jump-started the Stonewall Riots [in New York City in 1969], when the conservative queers were sitting in their closets."

In the end, Nipper is bothered by the disinterest of some of her colleagues when it comes to transgender equality and this particular report, especially since the 'T' of the LGBT community has the potential to catapult the movement much farther than it's ever been. "The people who are the most vilified, the most harassed and the most abused represent the furthest margins. If we can correct their issues -- transgender issues -- we can correct the issues that impact everyone in this movement."

Kellee Terrell is an award-winning Brooklyn, N.Y.-based freelance writer who writes about race, gender, health and pop culture. Terrell is also the news editor for thebody.com, a website about HIV/AIDS. She blogs about health for BET.com. Follow her on Twitter.

BLACK ENTERPRISE

On the Job: Gender Identity & Sexuality Discrimination in the Office

As the LGBT community fights for equality in the workplace, one transgender employee tells his story



by Souleo Posted: February 17, 2011

As a young girl, Kylar Broadus (born Karen) always knew that he was in the wrong body. He spent endless nights praying for God to change him from female-to-male. Finally, in 1995, after discovering that sex change procedures were covered through his company's insurance policy, he began a 15-year transition from Karen to Kylar, but the Columbia, Missouri native never thought that this decision would come at the cost of his job.

After seven years as an employee at a major financial institution, Broadus told his boss of his decision to have a sex change. In addition to beginning hormone therapy treatments, he changed his name to his present moniker and began dressing in a more masculine fashion. Broadus alleges that his boss created a hostile work environment where his every action was recorded; he was questioned about his sex life; he was accused of trying to coerce a White female superior into an affair; and he was inundated with extra work assignments that were frequently changed at the last minute. The covert harassment eventually became overt when Broadus' superior informed him that he would never advance in the company unless he changed his appearance.

advance in the company unless he changed his appearance.

"When I cut my hair off, he said, '[You'll] never be promoted with [your] hair like that, and next time you decide to do anything with your hair, call me first,'" recalls Broadus, now 47. "He said, 'It was radical.'"

Broadus sought help by reporting the abuse to his human resources department only to be "scolded like a child and told that women don't do this." The stress from work led Broadus to therapy sessions where he was diagnosed with depression, severe panic attacks, and post-traumatic stress disorder. At the end of his rope, he eventually left on a constructive discharge notice and sought legal retribution. The lawsuit was filed under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin. However, the case was dismissed because Broadus resided in Missouri, which is one of 38 states where it remains legal to discriminate based on gender identity or expression, compared to 29 states where—according to the Human Rights Campaign (HRC)—it remains legal to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

Michael Greenidge, a 29-year-old armed guard in Teaneck, New Jersey, has a different-yet-equally troubling experience with discrimination. As an openly gay male with self-described feminine features working in a traditionally masculine industry, he has quietly endured verbal attacks and threats from his colleagues.

“I experienced name-calling, like faggot, and [been told] that I’m going to hell,” says Greenidge. “My co-worker once told me to meet him outside and we started arguing, but I kept it from getting physical.”

He wasn’t as lucky during another incident that took place when he worked as a chef at a café in New York City. After being called out his name and then being struck, Greenidge was forced to defend himself. Despite the discriminatory nature of both instances, he refused to report either to human resources or seek outside counsel out of fear of losing his job, especially during the recession.

“I feel like if I take this to lawyers that I won’t be able to handle all of that,” says Greenidge of the potentially drawn out legal process. “No one wants to lose their job in a time like this and so they just deal with it.”

Trevor Branch, founder and CEO of The Branch Solution, a workplace issues/human resources consultancy company, notes that both Broadus and Greenidge’s examples of discrimination would have had more positive outcomes had there been federal protections in place for sexuality and gender identity based discrimination through the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). The bill, which has not yet been passed, aims to extend federal employment discrimination protections currently provided based on race, religion, sex, national origin, age and disability to sexual orientation and gender identity.

“Discrimination, unfortunately, is not something that is going away anytime soon,” says Branch. “We’ve seen a rise in sexual orientation discrimination complaints and that shows the needs for these types of bills.”

With minimal evidence of ENDA being signed into law anytime soon, Branch notes that it is the responsibility of individual companies to address workplace harassment and discrimination internally. According to the HRC, as of September 2009, 434 (87%) of the Fortune 500 companies had implemented non-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation, and 207 (41%) had policies that include gender identity.

“If a company is in a state without a state law, the company can amend their current policies around harassment, discrimination and workplace policy to include sexual orientation and gender identity,” says Branch. “That’s why it’s good to go to human resources first and always seek outside counsel as well.”

According to Nolo, a low-cost legal counsel service, the best way to deal with any form of discriminatory complaints in the workplace is quickly and carefully. The victim should never feel fearful of seeking remediation for a complaint of harassment, regardless of gender or sexuality. It is HR’s responsibility to investigate any and all claims by talking to both the accused and accuser, as well as possible witnesses. It is also advised that victims document all instances of harassment. That could include simply jotting down dates and times of harassment or saving all emails and memos that may be used as evidence. Having solid proof is the major difference between a case of he said/she said and an actual legal case.

Today, Broadus provides counsel to others as he speaks and lobbies on the national, state and local levels for transgender and sexual orientation equality in the workplace. In addition, he has served on the board of the National Black Justice Coalition, a leading civil rights organization dedicated to empowering black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. Broadus’ present work is a testament to his hope that one day LGBT professionals will be judged not by their bodies or sexual orientation, but by the quality of their body of work.

“That’s what we’re fighting for—everybody to have expression of who they are. I’m not harming anybody,” he says. “It’s not about sex or anybody else. It’s about me. This is who I am.”



Sharon J. Lettman-Hicks

Executive director, National Black Justice
Coalition

Posted: August 31, 2010 04:52 PM



BIO



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Department of Defense, I Am Waiting to Receive My Survey

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My husband is a proud member of the United States Air Force. A military career man. While he was stationed in Iraq, the moral support that helped him survive came through our letters, our calls, our communications, our connection. He had something magical to hold onto as he moved through every moment uncertain that he would live to see the next. Without our mutual support of one another, the daily uncertainty about his safety and well being would have been more debilitating than any human should have to endure.

In all of America's wars, men and women have relied upon partners back home to keep their spirits up, to keep their sanity intact, to remind them that they are loved dearly, and to inspire them to conquer the inconceivable.

But what if I were a man and we were a gay couple? How could I then reach out across the miles to offer comfort and support? He would have to conceal our correspondence for fear of being outed and then fired. Sometimes we'd be forced to forgo speaking to one another for his own security.

This is the reality of Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT), a U.S. military policy that bars openly gay men and women from serving in the armed forces. The thought of not being able to talk to my husband--or for him not to be able to communicate with me because of an unjust military law--is unconscionable. Brave men and women who are gay and lesbian are being pressured to suppress their identity and to compromise their personal integrity under DADT. They are barred from discussing their family life and their partners.

They are required to lie about who they are every day in order to protect and serve their country, and this act would take a tremendous toll on anyone. Adding insult to injury, the Department of Defense (DOD) has issued an offensive survey to spouses of servicemembers to determine the impact on our desire to be in social settings with gay men and lesbians serving openly, i.e., honestly, in the military. Personally, I don't see what all of the excitement and concern is about. I can't wait to welcome my gay and lesbian servicemembers and their spouses over for dinner.

Seriously, we are all concerned about the mental health of our servicemembers. Too many have returned with post-traumatic stress disorder or worse, resorting to suicide as a means of coping. But what about the traumas that are being inflicted by our own government against people who have boldly chosen to defend this country? For gay and lesbian servicemembers, there is the added stress and psychological damage from living a lie, serving in fear that they will be discovered, outed, and then fired for who they are. And if they tell the truth, there is hell to pay--loss of employment, benefits, career, status, and possibly something even more injurious, loss of faith in America.

So where is the humanity in DADT? My husband hung on my every word, spent hours in the internet cafe connecting with me, looked at my photo as much as possible just to get through each day. What if I were a man? He would have been forced to duck into corners to talk to me and to sometimes forgo any form of communication to protect his job. Isn't it enough to endure the stress of war? Should our servicemembers also have to endure the stress of government-sanctioned identity suppression?

When the military integrated to include women, they figured out how to accommodate bathrooms for men and women. When the military integrated to include Blacks, they figured out how to house everyone together. Surely, the Department of Defense can find a way to support the integrity of men and women who have already enrolled in the armed forces without sending out offensive surveys.

We worry about terrorists and meanwhile some of us think it's appropriate to require those who defend this country to suppress and lie about who they really are.

How dare any of us rob our active duty brothers and sisters of mental and emotional support from family, loved ones and spouses, be they gay or straight.

This is about love, integrity, self-respect, self-worth and most importantly, this is about family and support.

As a military spouse, I stand with every servicemember and their loved ones, especially my gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, who are putting their lives on the line just like my husband has done for 25 years of active duty.

As the Executive Director and CEO of the National Black Justice Coalition, an organization dedicated to eliminating racism and homophobia in America, I affirm the just cause of repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell. I want to thank all of the gay and lesbian servicemembers for their fortitude and patriotism. Thank you for remaining faithful to America and the promises of the United States Constitution, despite your lack of freedom to serve openly and honestly.

Secretary Gates, put that on my survey!

What the DOMA Decision Means for Black LGBT Families

February 24, 2011 at 5:18 PM

Big news from the Department of Justice [32], which announced that President Obama ordered the administration to stop fighting for Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act. He's decided that the federal law, which defines marriage as only between a man and a woman, discriminates against gay spouses and, therefore, is unconstitutional. It remains in effect unless Congress repeals it, and the administration will continue to enforce it -- but they will no longer defend it in court.

The president had always opposed DOMA, even promising a repeal from the campaign trail, but the Justice Department is required to defend federal laws if reasonable arguments can be made. Yet in light of two new lawsuits challenging Section 3 [33], the administration concluded that gays and lesbians deserved a higher standard of scrutiny.

"This decision is about the president's recognition that DOMA is not just a law on the books, but a deliberate strategy to bring discrimination against the LGBT community," says Sharon J. Lettman-Hicks, executive director of the National Black Justice Coalition, a civil rights organization dedicated to empowering black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Lettman-Hicks told The Root that she believes Obama's stand against DOMA is directly related to the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, and an effort to now acknowledge and extend benefits to gay military spouses. "We're removing the discriminatory practice of not admitting openly gay and lesbian individuals into the military, but, at the highest level of government, DOMA is just another layer of discrimination," she said.

In terms of civilians, Lettman-Hicks points out that a reversal of DOMA would also have particularly high stakes for black LGBT families. "The last Census showed that black families headed by same-sex couples are two times more likely to be raising children than white same-sex couples," she explained. "We're nontraditional households. We take in our nieces and nephews and everyone else, as well as having our own children. The trends of black LGBT families are not much different than those of the greater black community."

By virtue of that, ending DOMA would give those families the federal protections of marriage, such as health care benefits and family tax credits. The president's decision doesn't get them there yet, but it's a big step in that direction.

As for "But what took him so long?" skepticism surrounding the announcement, Lettman-Hicks rushed to the president's defense. In fact, the National Black Justice Coalition recently issued a Midterm Report Card [34] (pdf) giving the Obama administration high marks for a commitment to equality for LGBT people.

"I think that anyone who would chastise the president, who has done more for gay rights in two years than any of his predecessors, are on some new-wave cynicism to think that public policy changes overnight," she said. "I find the ardent support he has given the LGBT community unprecedented -- to not think of the political consequences, but to think about what's right."

BLACK ENTERPRISE

About This Issue: Coming Out At Work

by Sonia Alleyne Posted: July 6, 2011



We're not going to pretend this was an easy topic for Black Enterprise to consider. Let's face it—the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community is one of which our society whispers, mocks, ignores, and, in extreme cases, vehemently rejects. For Black members of this community, the emotional backlash can be even more intense. Editor-at-Large Carolyn M. Brown and I spent months producing this feature. Due to the topic's controversial nature, we had some difficulty finding subjects. Even some of those who agreed to participate in our cover story, "Black and Gay in Corporate America," felt some trepidation about how revealing their sexual orientation would affect relationships with family, friends, and associates outside the workplace.

Who is the gay Black professional? If you were to rely on media images, they are overtly flamboyant and dramatic male hairstylists and fashion designers. Depictions are often skewed comedic renderings of members of a community who in real life too often lead separate lives to buffer themselves—and their families—from ridicule. **"Many professionals are out in their community but private in the world," says Sharon J. Lettman-Hicks, executive director and CEO of the National Black Justice Coalition, a civil rights organization that seeks to empower the African American LGBT population. "There's a healthy Black, educated professional class of the gay, lesbian, and transgender community in this country. But there's no recognition of their existence. There's no protection for their rights—for silent or overt discrimination. Black people in general treat the existence of gays and lesbians and transgender people in the African American community like 'don't ask, don't tell,' the former U.S. policy governing homosexuality in the military.**

That code of silence has been the mode in which many LGBT employees have operated for decades. It's one of the reasons we structured our 40 Best Companies for Diversity differently this year. In addition to listing companies based on the percentage of African American and ethnic minority employees, senior managers, and board members, and on the procurement spend with Black and minority firms, we identified those corporations that also made the Human Rights Campaign's Best Places to Work list for LGBT employees. It's an indication that these firms believe in the power of full inclusion, and also that they're choosing not to overlook an \$800 billion-plus market.

What also drove the development of our feature is the growing number of professionals who have decided to share with the world their true selves (see sidebar on CNN anchor Don Lemon). Advocacy is never an easy journey, particularly when an individual has been thrust into such a position. The need to live behind a protective shield is very real to those who have suffered rejection, embarrassment, humiliation, and sometimes even violence. Sometimes, however, it becomes evident that coming forward with a personal testimony and an example of success could help improve the lot of others. We developed this feature to communicate that anyone can make a significant contribution. They just need to gain the opportunity to stand up and be counted.

Be sure to pick up the July 2011 issue of BLACK ENTERPRISE when it hits national newsstands Tuesday, July 19 and look for more of our Black LGBT coverage all month long at www.BlackEnterprise.com/BlackLGBT.

<http://www.blackenterprise.com/2011/07/06/about-this-issue-coming-out-of-the-shadows/>

The Work Begins Within

By Jerome Hunt



A few weeks back I had the pleasure to attend the National Black Justice Coalition's (NBJC)—the only national Black LGBT civil rights organization—second annual OUT on the Hill Black LGBT Leadership Summit. The summit afforded me the opportunity to meet a number of local and national grassroots and organizational leaders who are advocating for equality for Black LGBT individuals not only in the Black community but also in the broader LGBT movement. Participants were treated to a number of panels that discussed Black LGBT issues, briefings by Obama administration officials, and the opportunity to lobby members of Congress and their aides.

While this was a wonderful experience I am glad I was able to partake in, I could not help but notice the proverbial pink elephant in the room—a Black LGBT leadership summit was being hosted the same week of the annual Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's (CBCF) Legislative Conference. This made me wonder: Was this the only time Black LGBT issues could garner attention locally and nationally? Then I started to think: Does it really matter? No. It really doesn't.

The more important question we should be asking ourselves in the Black LGBT community is: How do we get our issues to matter year round, not just during an event that brings Black leaders and Black LGBT leaders together in the same city at the same time? The answer is simple from my perspective—the work has to begin within. The leadership summit and legislative conference are a great springboard to present Black LGBT issues to a large Black audience and advocate for change. The work begins way before these leaders assemble in Washington, D.C., however.

As a Black LGBT community, we must do our part to ensure Black LGBT issues are present and accounted for year round in the larger LGBT movement and in broader societal conversations. We cannot sit around and wait to be invited into the conversation for equality. Instead, we must be on the ground informing people within and outside of the community why equality is needed. People need to be informed that the quest for equality is much more than marriage. The Black LGBT

community and communities of color for that matter suffer disproportionately from discriminatory laws that impede employment, health care, family recognition, and a slew of other factors.

Whether it is grassroots organizing, volunteering in the LGBT community, or working for a mainstream LGBT organization, the plight of Black LGBT individuals and families must be discussed and advocated for. There is nothing wrong with advocating for the needs of Black LGBT individuals when advocating for the general LGBT collective, because if we don't, who will? More importantly, it is critical to address the needs of those marginalized within the LGBT community if equality is going to be achieved for all. The road will not be easy and it will be filled with bumps and naysayers, but Black LGBT equality is not separate from LGBT equality in general. It is a key component of the equation.

While the pink elephant in the room may be a strategic effort and ignored by some, I am ready to do my part to advance our movement to include all LGBT people. It can be as simple as writing or calling members of Congress and asking them to consider legislation that will improve the lives of the Black LGBT community, or volunteering in the Black LGBT community. Maybe even making sure that the Black LGBT perspective is being considered at panels and town halls, either through the inclusion of Black LGBT individuals or through asking questions that center around Black LGBT issues. No matter if the action is big or small, it will help ensure Black LGBT issues are being presented into the larger mainstream discussion.

NBJC's OUT on the Hill and the CBCF Legislative Conference should not be the only time that awareness about Black LGBT issues is presented. Work must be done year round, and we cannot sit back and expect our Black LGBT leaders to do all the work.

We all stand to benefit from the equality we seek. No matter if you are young or old, experienced or inexperienced, you can make a difference. Will you join me? Will you stand and answer the call?

Gay 'gang' members speak at LGBT youth forum

By Lou Chibbaro Jr



More than 20 members of Check It, a group of local gay youth that D.C. police have listed as a gang, turned out Monday night for a town hall meeting on problems faced by the city's LGBT youth.

Lesbian activist Treona Kelty, whose organization Beautiful U – Yes U organized the event, said two Check It members told more than 100 people who turned out for the town hall that they consider their organization an extended “family” of mostly gay and bisexual men who have been ostracized by their parents and schools and misunderstood by police.

The town hall was held at the Metropolitan Community Church on Ridge Street, N.W., which has a mostly LGBT congregation.

Two Check It members were joined on a panel by Jeffrey Richardson, director of the Mayor's Office of GLBT Affairs; Sharon Lettman-Hicks, executive director of the National Black Justice Coalition; Amena Johnson of D.C.'s Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL); and Brian Watson of Transgender Health Empowerment.

<http://www.washingtonblade.com/2011/10/26/gay-gang-members-speak-at-lgbt-youth-forum/>

Attacking Indifference

Community groups converge to offer aid and emotional support to black LGBT youth

by John Riley

Washington residents, government agencies and community groups rallied at an Oct. 24 town hall to sound an alarm about problems facing “black LGBTQI youth” in the District, and blasted adults in both the black and LGBT communities for failing to provide those youth with support and opportunities to improve their lives.

The town-hall meeting, held at the Metropolitan Community Church of Washington, was called by Tre'ona Kelty, of the group Beautiful U Yes U, in response to a column in The Washington Post highlighting a group known as the “Check It” gang.

According to the article, the Check Its are a group of LGBT black youth who banded together to provide protection and support for one another after many were discriminated against, bullied in school or kicked out of their homes by parents because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.



The group, which tends to congregate in the city's Chinatown neighborhood, has been targeted by other youths and has had multiple run-ins with officers from the Metropolitan Police Department. Members of the group were present in the audience and some rose to speak or ask questions during the two-hour meeting, which drew about 70 attendees.

The town hall – organized by Beautiful U Yes U, the One Mic Stand Show, and Damien Ministries – featured a panel of community activists as well as representatives from the Metropolitan Police Department's Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit (GLLU), Metro Teen-AIDS, Transgender Health Empowerment, the National Aurora Campaign, the Mayor's Office of GLBT Affairs, D.C. Child and Family Services (DCFS), the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL), the National Black Justice Coalition. One panel member, community activist Ian Edwards, also identified himself as an Air Force recruiter...

<http://www.metroweekly.com/news/?ak=6701>

Straight Sister of the LGBT Movement

NBJC's Sharon Lettman-Hicks discusses work, motivation and a lesson from Transgender Day of Remembrance

by John Riley

METROWEEKLY

At first glance, Sharon Lettman-Hicks doesn't seem like your typical LGBT activist.

For starters, she's a straight woman. She's married to a military husband. She proudly says she was raised with "strong Christian values." But LGBT people, especially those of color, would have a hard time finding a more passionate advocate who demands nothing less than their full equality and freedom to express their identity.

Just don't call her an ally.

"I hate the word 'ally,' because I don't consider myself an ally," she says. "I consider myself a sister in a movement, because to me it is a family affair and black LGBT people are my brothers and sisters."

Currently serving as the executive director of the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC), a civil rights organization dedicated to empowering black LGBT people by fighting racism and homophobia, Lettman-Hicks describes her involvement as a fierce advocate for LGBT equality as part of a "natural migration" resulting from her own experiences facing discrimination from within the African-American community.

Growing up as the dark-skinned child of Hispanic immigrants, Lettman-Hicks says she often faced discrimination from both the Latino and African-American communities, who were unsure of how to deal with her. A personal battle with obesity during adolescence also made her a target for discrimination.

"It's very cultural for me," she says of the struggle of black LGBT people to gain acceptance, particularly within the African-American community. "It's very much a part of my DNA. And how dare anyone, especially within our cultural community, deny another black person the right to be whole after all we've overcome after generations and centuries as a people?"

In October 2009, after eight years working for People for the American Way Foundation, Lettman-Hicks joined NBJC, where she began working on initiatives to engage the black church community on LGBT issues. At times, she wages a two-front effort on behalf of the black LGBT community to earn recognition and respect as a potential partner from both LGBT and black organizations.

"My first responsibility is to remove the black-on-black crime against black LGBT people within the black community," she says. "I coin it, 'We are black, too.' And it's also to build more inclusion of recognition of the beautiful black talent within the LGBT community."

But she says there are some significant hurdles to those goals.

"As far as I'm concerned, black people still live by 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.' Culturally, it's not a social issue that we talk about, because of some of the overt homophobia – and at the same time, not wanting to take on mommy, daddy, uncle, aunty. It starts in the family. And then it's in the schools, in the community."

To begin addressing some of those issues, including the bullying of black LGBT youth in schools and violence against LGBT people, NBJC has begun an outreach and education campaign to a number of black media outlets, including Black Enterprise magazine, Essence magazine and the Tom Joyner Morning Show.

"I think people can count on the National Black Justice Coalition to be on the forefront of bringing awareness of black LGBT issues, challenges and triumphs to the black community in a much more deliberate way," says Lettman-Hicks.

With Nov. 20 marking the annual Transgender Day of Remembrance, Lettman-Hicks says it can – and must – move beyond simply memorializing victims lost to anti-transgender violence or bias, which has recently increased to a level Lettman-Hicks characterizes as a "crisis situation."

"I think this is going to be the time where the 'urgency of now' will prevail. I think that this particular anniversary is not just about remembrance, but about how the level of violent crimes against the transgender community has escalated at a more aggressive and accelerated level.

"We can see this year in remembrance as a time to do a call for action. ... It needs to be more on an 'Occupy Wall Street' level, where it's much more speaking out in solidarity, it's a much more strategic arm. We're declaring this day as a kick-off to a much more aggressive strategy of recognition and education about the challenges within the transgender community, particularly around violent crimes."



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