THE POWER OF US.

A Visual Public Awareness Campaign

National Black Justice Coalition

Featuring images by Duane Cramer







The National Black Justice Coalition (www.nbjc.org) proudly presents a photographic journey spanning the diversity of Black Americans featuring Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender individuals, along with our families and allies. The following pages feature just a few of the out, proud, straight-allied and vocal members of our community. We aim to break down walls of homophobia by sharing the vibrant, affirming, and supportive lives of Black LGBT. **The Power of Us** celebrates the unity, value and worth of the Black LGBT community.

Design: Emily Foran | **Make-up & Hair:** Mark Starr | *Duane Cramer photo by Philippe Gosselin*

On previous page: **Dr. Marjorie J. Hill,** CEO of Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) New York City; **Greg Wilson & Jeffrey C. King,** Greg is Youth Coordinator at My Life, a component of In The Meantime Men's Group, which was envisioned and founded by Jeffrey, who is the Executive Director; and **Duane Cramer,** photographer and social activist.

THE POWER OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership is about providing a vision and purpose, and defining goals in a way that influences others to join you in achieving a collective vision—a shared and purposed community goal.

Powerful and principled leaders have strong beliefs and values, a clear sense of their own ethical standards, and understand the strengths and weaknesses of their own characters. Equally important is that successful leaders possess a great deal of knowledge and skills which allow them to keep their eyes and ears to the future, recognize when there is a need for change, and know how and when to implement and manage those changes.

It has almost become a cliché that leaders are "made, not born," but it seems to hold true over time. Some people are natural leaders; their personality traits enable them to take on leadership roles. Others take on leadership because of the circumstances calling for it. They respond to a crisis which calls for a leader to resolve it. Still, others are transformational, taking on leadership by choice and learning what it takes to lead.

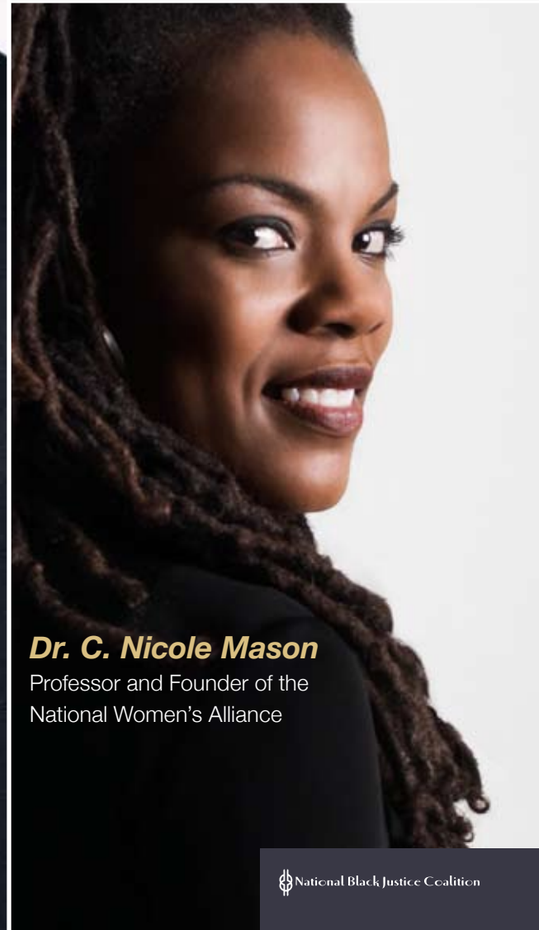
The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a prime example of a leader. As we look back on history, his call to leadership seems to fit all three paths to leadership. Dr. King's role seems prophetic and a product of circumstances at the same time. A gifted and youthful orator, Dr. King held strong beliefs about justice and valued personal liberty and equality. His Christian beliefs clearly articulated the ethical standards to which he aspired and urged others to embrace. He was a man of great character and outstanding knowledge and skills. However, he was called by the times in which he lived to transform himself into not simply a leader of a congregation of believers, but of a nation – a world – in need. *(continued on following pages)*



H. Alexander Robinson
C.E.O. & Executive Director of the
National Black Justice Coalition



Toni Collins
Co-founder and
Chairman of the Board
of Directors for
Transgender Health
Empowerment inc.



Dr. C. Nicole Mason
Professor and Founder of the
National Women's Alliance

National Black Justice Coalition

THE POWER OF LEADERSHIP

Like all great leaders, Dr. King understood that the way to succeed in leadership—the way to survive—was to reshape to the needs of a rapidly changing world. All around him African-Americans were the subjects of often violent discrimination and racial oppression. There were many who saw the way forward as reciprocal violence. However, led by his wisdom and the advice of a close advisor, Bayard Rustin, Dr. King learned and pursed another path to justice.

Rustin, a Black same-gender-loving man who lived his life openly, had been introduced to the non-violent tactics that became the bulwark of Dr. King's movement for civil rights. He was a clarion voice to which King listened. Rustin too was a leader. Imagine what could have happened if these two icons of our nation's history had not charted a non-violent path to justice—such is the power of leadership.

Being a leader is not often easy, and many great leaders overcome tremendous odds and make extraordinary personal sacrifices to become champions for their causes. Barbara Jordan was such a leader.

Barbara Jordan was born in the Fifth Ward of Houston, Texas to a Black Baptist minister, Benjamin Jordan, and a domestic worker, Arlyne Jordan. She attended Roberson Elementary and Phyllis Wheatley High School. She attended Texas Southern University, and in 1956 she graduated magna cum laude with a double major in political science and history.

Jordan ran for a seat in the Texas House of Representatives in 1962 and 1964, but lost both times. She made history when she was elected to the newly drawn Texas Senate seat in 1966, thereby becoming the first Black to serve in that body since 1883. In 1967 Jordan became the first Black elected official to preside over that body; she was also the first Black state senator to chair a major committee, Labor and Management Relations, and the first freshman senator ever named to the Texas Legislative Council. In 1972, Barbara Jordan was elected to the U.S. Congress from the Eighteenth Congressional District in Houston.

Both as a state senator and as a U.S. Congresswoman, Jordan championed the cause of poor, Black and disadvantaged people. One of her most important bills as senator was the Workman's Compensation Act, which increased the maximum benefits paid to injured workers. As a congresswoman, she sponsored legislation to broaden the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to cover Mexican-Americans in Texas and other southwestern states and to extend its authority to those states where minorities had been denied the right to vote or had had their rights restricted by unfair registration practices, such as literacy tests.

Jordan was a lesbian with a longtime companion of more than 20 years, Nancy Earl, though she never publicly acknowledged her sexual orientation Jordan's courageous leadership remains an inspiration to all Americans, especially Black LGBT Americans. Thus, we know both the power and the price of her leadership.

Of course leaders seldom lead alone and often have the companionship of family. In some cases they share the mantle of leadership. Certainly Coretta Scott King was an inspiration, as a helper to Dr. King and later a leader in her own right.

That is certainly true in the lives of Dr. Alvin Williams and Nigel Simon. Alvin is a native of South Carolina and a practicing dentist in Maryland. Nigel is an environmental protection specialist for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in DC.



Phill Wilson
Founder and Executive Director of the Black AIDS Institute



Maurice Jamal
Director, writer, & producer whose recent work includes the film, "Dirty Laundry"



Courtney Snowden
Lobbyist and President of D.C. Black Pride

Alvin and Nigel are raising their three adopted children in Prince George's County, Maryland. They are one of the nine couples who sued the state of Maryland for the right to marry. They met in 1977, and after three years of courtship affirmed their commitment to each other in a Holy Union commitment ceremony.

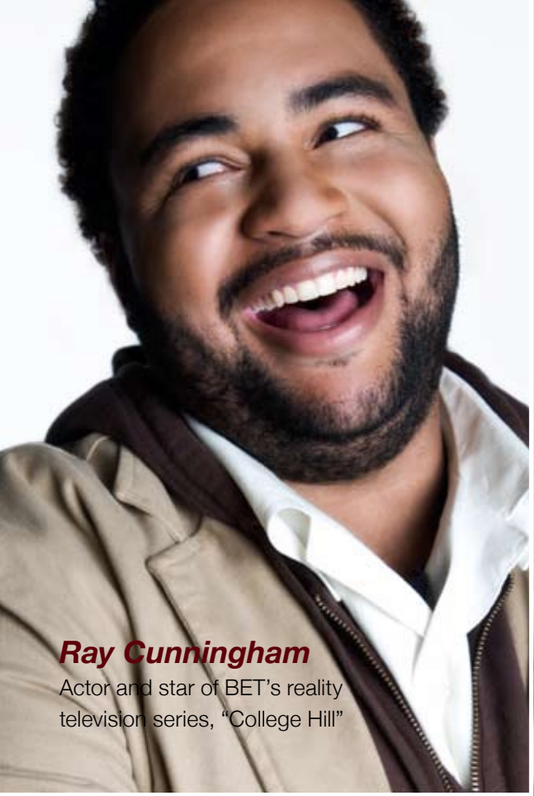
Throughout the course of their relationship, the two had often discussed the idea of raising a family. In 2001 they adopted three-year-old Kiran. Later they would adopt Renee and Mateo, a brother and sister; all three children were from a foster home.

Alvin and Nigel are pillars of the black LGBT community in the greater Washington, DC area. Their commitment to their family, their church, the black community and LGBT civil rights is well-known and shows in everything they do. They lead by example, and they lead because they care. The power of their love is the power of leadership.

To be a leader is to be committing of one's self to empowering others. To lead is to understand that leadership is not solely or even primarily about being in charge, but rather about having, acquiring and exercising the capacity to motivate and move others to action.

If you are ready to lead, sit up and take the reins, but comfort yourself for it may be a bumpy ride. In the end its rewards are shared and plentiful.

-H. Alexander Robinson



Ray Cunningham
Actor and star of BET's reality television series, "College Hill"



Cheril N. Clarke
Prolific author of four novels and a stage play



Rev. Dyan McCray
Pastor of Unity Fellowship Church in Washington, D.C.

THE POWER OF SPIRITUALITY

Someone once said that we are not human beings who have spiritual encounters, but spiritual beings having a human encounter. Spiritual, beings of the soul, sacred, eternal. The power of spirituality; tapping into the eternal resources of the divine. The power of spirituality is the power of love, of God, of the celestial and the sacred. There is no greater power.

Our eternal souls are expressing themselves within our mortal, human casing. We are God's thoughts in human form. Ever deepening spirituality involves our relationships to God, others and ourselves. Yet we LGBT people have had to endure experiences, attitudes and realities beneath the dignity of a sovereign people and children of God.

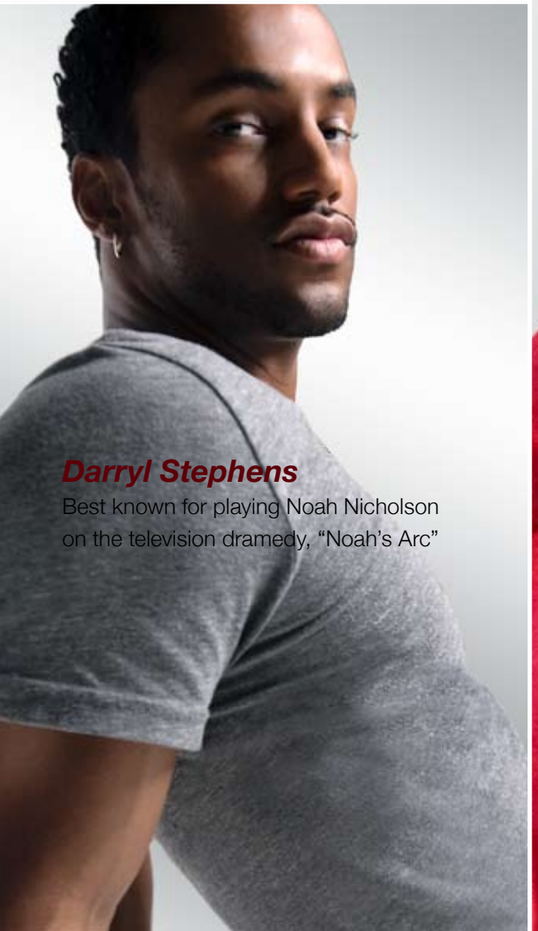
And yet, we have survived. We have survived without the benefit of powerful privileges. We have survived a culture constructed in direct animosity and opposition to the very possibility of our divinity. We have spent time, energy, money and intellectual capital addressing the moral questions of our day, by simply and profoundly trying to "snatch our humanity from the fires of human cruelty," as James Baldwin wrote.

It has been placed upon us to be involved in the moral and spiritual questions: Who are we as human beings? Why are we here? Where are we going? What is the purpose of our faith?

I submit to you that the purpose of our faith should be to bring justice to the world. And justice does not mean just us gays and lesbians. It does not mean just us African-Americans, or just us Europeans, or just us Latinos, or just us Native Americans, or just us Christians. If your faith is not about doing justice every time and place you can then I say that you need to expand the parameters of your spirituality.

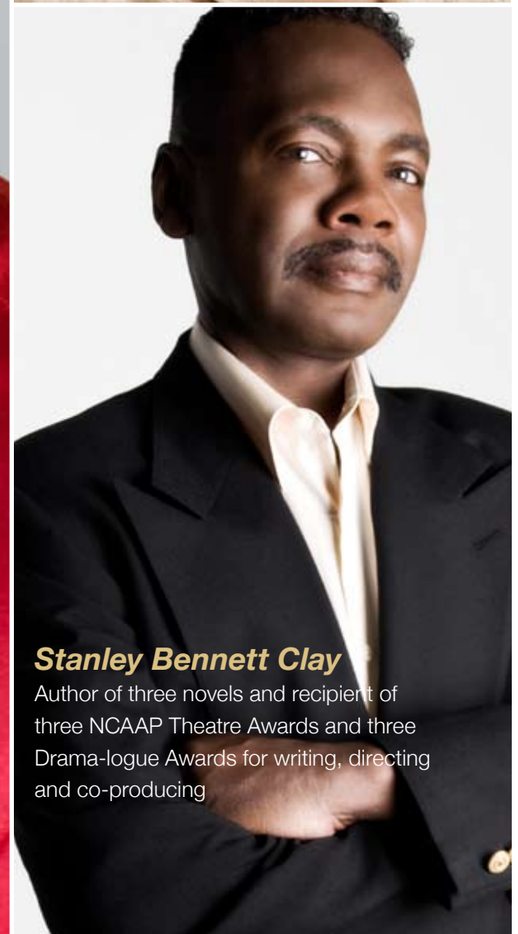
You need to see or be aware of the connections of the oppressions. You are challenged to connect the dots between racism, sexism and homophobia—lies to the spirit, soul-killing brews of animosity and hostility.
(continued on following pages)











THE POWER OF SPIRITUALITY

Spiritually enlightened people have figured out that discrimination, not homosexuality, is immoral and love between consenting adults is a glorious thing no matter the orientation. The profound spiritual leader Bishop Yvette Flunder said: *“God is not using us in spite of who we are, God is using us because of who we are.”* Our gayness is a spiritual gift that has brought blessings to the world through our collective talents, our enduring spirit, and our place in the universe as those who raise consciousness and have much to teach the world about love.

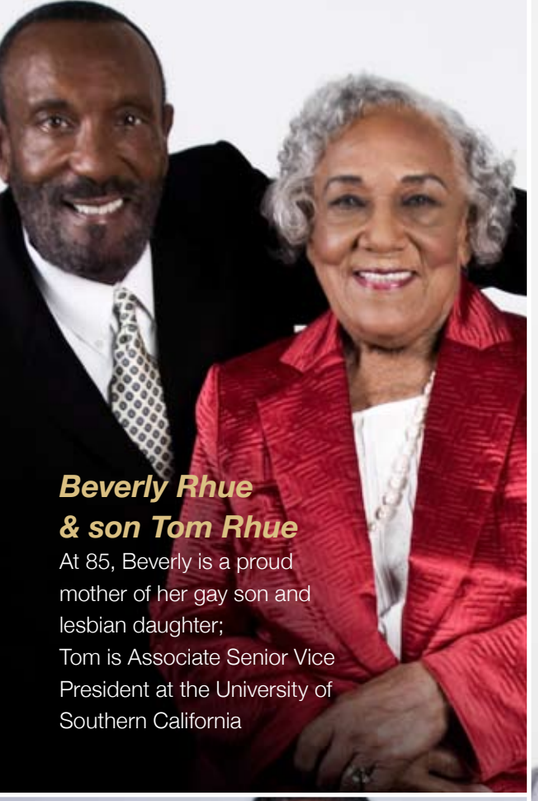
How do we characterize our historical moment? That is up to us as we address the moral and spiritual questions of the day. Marianne Williamson’s thoughts on spirituality brought to the world’s attention by Nelson Mandela in his inaugural speech:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our dark that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

We are “powerful beyond measure” because we are spiritual beings.

-Dr. Sylvia Rhue

National Black Justice Coalition



Beverly Rhue & son Tom Rhue

At 85, Beverly is a proud mother of her gay son and lesbian daughter;
Tom is Associate Senior Vice President at the University of Southern California



Renee Henderson

Human Resource professional



Quincy LeNear & Deondray Gossett

Co-creators/ producers/ directors of the internationally acclaimed television series, “The DL Chronicles”

THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS

A relationship is a connection between two (or more, in some cases) people who share an emotional and/or physical involvement with each other. The foundation of a relationship typically requires communication and time, and in romantic relationships also includes intimacy. But in powerful relationships the ingredients required are savvy individuals who function as one unit who are able to understand, trust, forgive and commit to one another.

From the start, same-gender relationships are fighting an up-hill battle when compared to those in the heterosexual community. It’s very similar to the generational Black family saying about our white counterparts that “everything they do [whites], Blacks have to do and work twice as hard” in order to get the same degree and amount of recognition.

As gay men and women, we have to put forth double the amount of work and effort in comparison to our relationship than our straight brothers and sisters do. The foundations of straight and gay relationships are similar in their need for communication, time and intimacy.

But gay people take on additional baggage in trying to determine who is head of the household and/or who wears the pants. A gay man, for example, isn’t only concerned about whether or not the person he is dating is someone he would take home to meet his mother, but rather, if that person is someone with whom he wants to be seen in public.

Straight people are less likely to worry about how straight they are, whereas gay people typically question just how masculine, feminine, flamboyant, or “straight-acting” they are.

Further, our society has placed numerous constraints upon gay relationships by restricting marriage between two people of the same gender. While a few states allow same-gender marriages and/or civil unions, the majority of states have openly barred the recognition of same-gender marriage.

THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS

This causes trouble in same-gender relationships when seeking the financial benefits associated with taxes, home-ownership, insurance and other tangible items. And let's not forget death. Even with proper planning and careful drafting of legal documents same-gender couples are only able to accomplish some of these things. The institution of marriage affords over 1,000 federal benefits that civil unions and legal documents cannot. But Love conquers all and successful relationships are do-able if both parties are ready.

The first step requires that you be at peace with yourself. To be at peace with yourself, you must know where your limits and comfort zones exist. Do you know your strengths and challenges or what you can or cannot tolerate and how those things relate to your morals?

Once you have figured out who you are, you have to be ready to love you, because who you think you are is important and the key to making yourself complete. Basically, you can't expect someone to love you when you don't love yourself; nor should you expect someone else to make you feel whole either. Instead you should look for someone who compliments your completeness.

Next, we must learn how to communicate, because love is a contract, and everyone needs to be aware of what it is they are agreeing to. Communication requires being able to understand what you want from the relationship and being able to convey your goals and ambitions to your partner. It is okay to disagree, but always try to understand what your partner is saying.

The first few conversations are typically the most truthful because people generally feel like they have nothing to lose, so pay attention. Also keep in mind that communication involves both verbal and non-verbal skills, therefore you don't need someone who says one thing, and does another. If you hear or see something you cannot tolerate don't go into the relationship thinking you can change it. Most importantly, don't fool yourself into believing that you will be able to tolerate it either, because all the things you accept against your better knowledge will be the things you regret in the end.

Next, we must trust, which is not easy to build and can make or break a relationship. It can take weeks, months or years to establish trust in a relationship, but only one incident to destroy it. Trust is one of the first steps of risk for the people involved because you are letting down your walls and exposing yourself. Most people start to trust their partner more by observing how their partner is likely to behave in certain situations and making sure their actions are consistent.

Partners generally reward one another when right, and punish them when wrong. Therefore, it is important not to conceal things and to be open with your partner so s/he will feel comfortable with you. Any major changes in how you perceive the relationship must be communicated to your partner know first. The deep hurt often comes when s/he hears it from someone else or discovers it on their own.

After that comes Forgiveness, because no relationship is perfect and forgiveness restores trust. The hard part about forgiveness is that it snaps you right back to step one, like a "go straight to jail" card in Monopoly, and you can't collect that $200 for all the other stuff you went through. Don't seek revenge or retribution, because it will only prolong the pain.



Dr. Phillip B. Terry & brother John T. Terry
Phillip is Senior Director of Emergency and International Services, American Red Cross of the National Capitol Area. John is a straight ally to the LGBT community.



Patrik Ian Polk
Screenwriter, singer, actor & creator of the Black gay series, "Noah's Arc" as well as the film, "Punks"



Gloria Bigelow
Out & proud comedienne

That is why the first step is exactly that, because you have already decided what you could and could not tolerate. Remember, you don't deserve to be abused, constantly betrayed and lied to, because you ought to have better. However, if you decide to forgive your partner you can't throw the mistake in his/her face later or use it as ammunition in another argument.

Arguments are arguments, and they don't necessarily lead to break ups or fights. Sometimes when we argue we say things we do not mean that need to be forgiven. No relationship can last a long period of time without forgiveness.

If you have been able to accomplish all of these other steps, you've now reached the Commitment step. This stage is the best because you have already determined that love takes work and that your partner is the one you want on your team. You know there is no perfect partner, but there is a perfect partner for you.

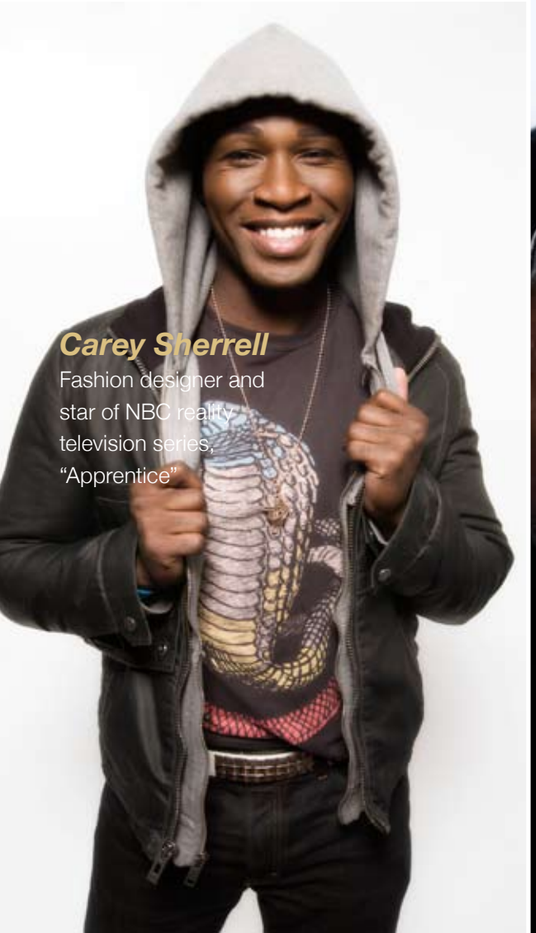
I believe my friend Cory, a DC resident who has been with his partner for seven years and with whom he shares a child, said it best when he told me, "A BETTER YOU IS A BETTER ME." He went on to say that single people are often powerful and successful in their professional lives, but that they usually don't know how to transfer that success into a relationship. Relationships are full-time jobs on top of the career you are working to establish.

At the end of the day, your relationship is your relationship and no one else's. Follow your heart, and don't let society determine or influence your happiness because you have the power to make your relationship successful.

-Robert D. Snowden



Kathy Harris
Actress, model, host, poet and star of BET reality television series, “College Hill”



Carey Sherrell
Fashion designer and star of NBC reality television series, “Apprentice”



Paris Barclay
Emmy Award-winning Director and Producer



Staceyann Chin
Artist, out poet and political activist

THE POWER OF MEDIA

Whether it happens consciously or unconsciously, society takes many of its cues, mores, cultural identities, and personal beliefs from the messages and images generated by and through the media. What was once considered taboo yester-year is currently considered “in” today. What was once considered to be risqué a generation ago is now considered to be completely blasé today.

The cultural evolution from who we once were in the past to who we are today is due in large part to the power and the persuasiveness of the media. That is why it is absolutely imperative that the Black LGBT community take control of its own identity, its own message, its own image, and its own media presentation.

As long as Pastor, Big Mama and Uncle Joe are not aware of the vibrant, productive, spiritually dynamic and creatively brilliant contributions and lives of our community along with knowledge of the massive numbers that we exist, it only perpetuates the stereotypes of what it is to be LGBT. To them we still are caricatures and a collage of stereotypes long held over from the past.

But today through the power of the internet, television, radio and through books and magazines, a 15 year old boy in rural Mississippi spiraling deep in depression can be uplifted by reading about others just like him who have soared in all areas of their lives.

Today a closeted 43 year old mother of four living in the South side of Chicago can see, read, and hear the stories of other women just like herself and take comfort in knowing that not only is she not alone, but that there are resources and support systems that will assist her in coming out to her authentic self.

Today to be Black and openly LGBT can no longer be seen as an anomaly but instead as a reality. Today our images, our lives, and our spiritual

THE POWER OF MEDIA

paths are gushing into the vibrant tapestry of American culture as well as the culture of the world through the power of the media.

Just 5 years ago there were no Black LGBT television series. Today we can boast "The DL Chronicles" and "Noah's Arc." Just 5 years ago, there was only one nationwide Black Gay Magazine. Today we boast 4 and counting!

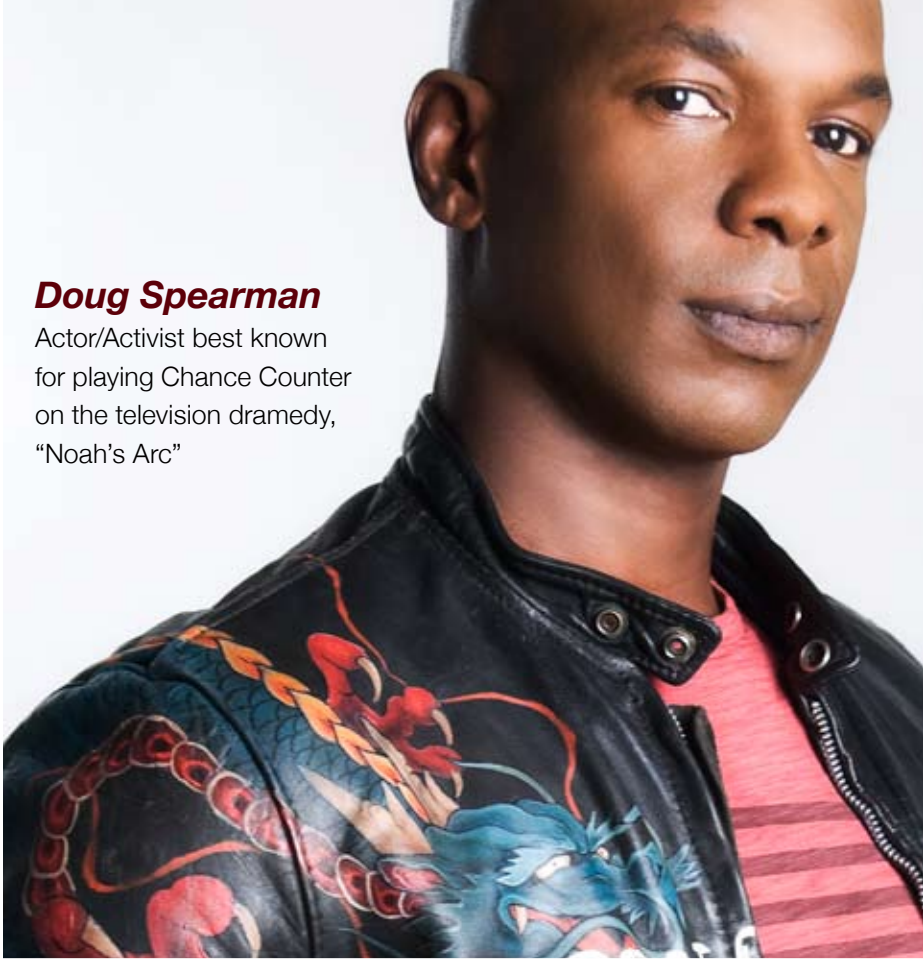
Just 5 years ago there was no nationwide, viably active, fully funded and fully staffed Black LGBT civil rights organization advocating in the political arena, through the media and through an extensive faith outreach on behalf of Black LGBT men, women and youth. Today we have the National Black Justice Coalition which does all of this and more.

NBJC understands, recognizes and embraces the power of the media. We reach people where they are through the media. Through the power of the internet, we have pioneered our way via our websites, blogs, webcasts, and podcasts in displaying, highlighting, and celebrating the lives of Black LGBT.

We have also produced a nationwide print magazine, NYANSAPO so that there is printed proof of our vibrant and unashamed existence. We also target and pitch news stories to mainstream media outlets that specifically include stories about our lives as Black LGBT.

Hence NBJC has become part of the solution of increasing the visibility of our community and in taking complete control and ownership in telling our own stories, framing our own messages, creating our own identities, and developing our own media portrayals.

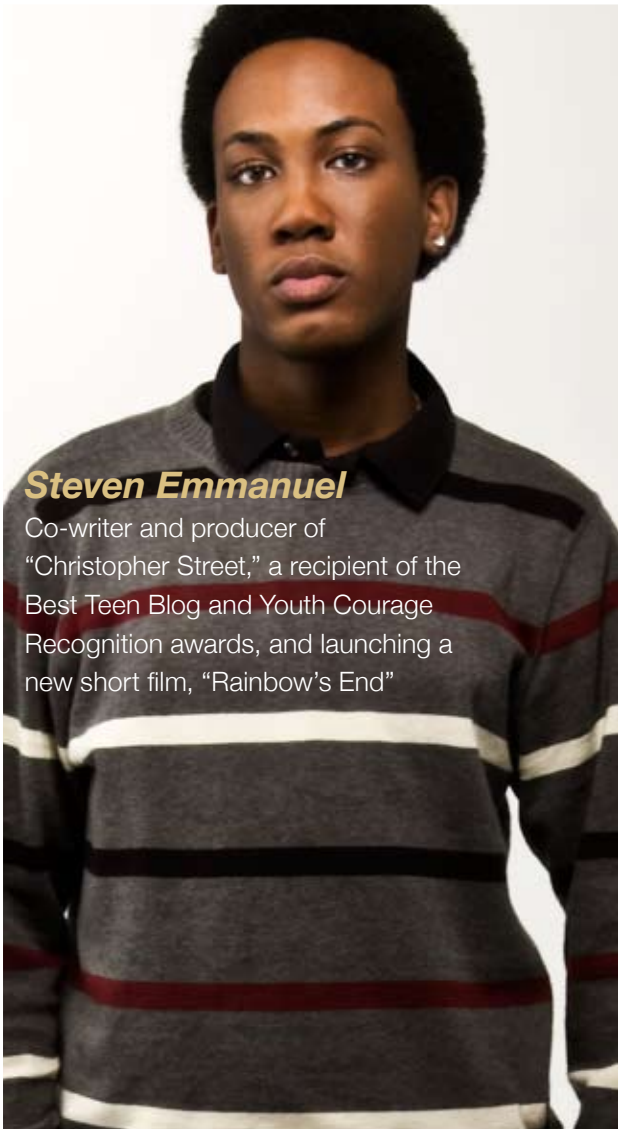
-Herndon L. Davis



Doug Spearman
Actor/Activist best known for playing Chance Counter on the television dramedy, "Noah's Arc"



Rashad Robinson
Senior Director of Media Programs for the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)



Steven Emmanuel
Co-writer and producer of "Christopher Street," a recipient of the Best Teen Blog and Youth Courage Recognition awards, and launching a new short film, "Rainbow's End"