Jumping the Broom



A BLACK PERSPECTIVE ON SAME-GENDER MARRIAGE

Contents

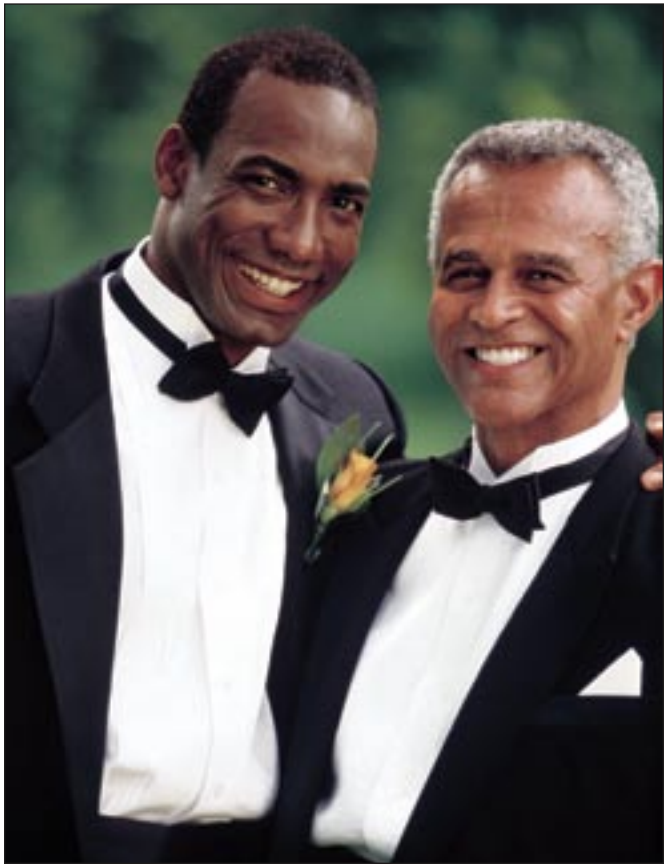
5 Same-Sex Marriage: A Matter of Civil Rights?
6 Isn't Marriage a Religious Institution?
9 Getting to the Heart of the Matter
12 Is Marriage Equality a "Civil Right"?
16 Why Not Civil Unions or Domestic Partnerships?
20 Maryland's Treatment of Gay and Lesbian Couples
23 Interracial Marriage Bans vs. Same-Sex Marriage Bans
25 Is Marriage a Constitutional Right?
28 Where Does the Black Community Stand?
32 Same-Sex Marriage and the Protection of Children
35 The Least of These: Marriage Discrimination Harms Children
38 Marriage Discrimination: Particularly Harmful to Black Families
40 Marriage Discrimination Breaks Up Families
42 Marriage Inequality Affects the Health of Black Families
44 America is Behind the Times
46 Conclusion
48 About the Authors
50 Resources for Further Information

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Same-Sex Marriage: A Matter of Civil Rights?

Generations of African Americans have worked to make our nation's promise of equal justice a reality. From Emancipation and Brown vs. Board of Education to everything beyond, black communities have struggled to gain due respect in society. Today, lesbian and gay couples working to end discrimination in marriage often invoke the spirit of civil rights in their quest to legally marry.

Are marriage rights for same-sex couples the next hurdle in our ongoing movement for civil rights? Black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Marylanders seem to think so, and are actively seeking to achieve this next level of equality. Some key architects of the African American civil rights movement are joining with them, calling the ability to marry the person of our choice a matter of basic human rights.



"From time to time, America comes to a crossroads. With confusion and controversy, it's hard to spot that moment. We need cool heads, warm hearts, and America's core principles to cleanse away the distractions … We are now at such a crossroads over same-sex couples' freedom to marry. It is time to say forthrightly that the government's exclusion of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters from civil marriage officially degrades them and their families…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."

—U.S. Representative John Lewis (D-Ga.), worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King and was one of the original speakers at the 1963 March on Washington

Isn't Marriage a Religious Institution?

Before one can really make sense of the issue of same-sex marriage, it is important to distinguish between the state-created institution of marriage and religious marriages performed in churches and other places of worship.

Rights and Rites: Legal Marriage vs. Religious Marriage

Gays and lesbians are seeking the right to legally marry. In addition, many individuals are also working within their own faith traditions to challenge the exclusion of same-sex couples from the rites performed by clergy.

Legal marriage and religious marriage are entirely distinct from one another.

A marriage license issued by the Clerk of Court's office unlocks the door to more than 1,000 securities, benefits, rights, and obligations that enable two people to properly care for each other and their family. A couple does not need to comply with any religious requirement to obtain a marriage license, nor does the license confer any religious approval.

To be valid, the couple must be legally married in a ceremony performed by anyone who has been authorized by the state of Maryland to solemnize the marriage. This includes any clerk of the court, or any official of a religious body authorized by the rules and customs of that body to perform a marriage ceremony. The flexibility of that definition means individuals from all walks of life can become authorized to solemnize marriages. The Universal Life Church, for instance, will ordain anyone who asks, without question of faith, for life. They are found online, and there is no fee. The church has two tenets: the absolute right of freedom of religion and "to do that which is right." Many people become "ordained" online and authorized by the state to officiate at the ceremony of friends or relatives, even though they are not clergy by the more standard definition.

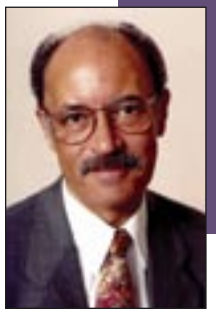
While clergy can, of course, legally marry a same-sex couple, a religious blessing is entirely separate from the civil function of the marriage license.

Many people incorrectly believe that places of worship will be forced to marry same-sex couples if such marriages become a legal option. This is simply not true.

Even if marriage becomes a legal option for same-sex couples, churches will always decide for themselves whether to perform or recognize any marriage, just as they already do for every couple. Some clergy refuse to marry interfaith couples. Other clergy refuse to marry a couple if one member has been divorced. No court decision or legislative mandate can change these fundamental tenets of freedom of religion, which are guaranteed in both the U.S. and Maryland constitutions.

Fortunately, no one has proposed that churchs or religious institutions be forced to perform same-sex marriages. The decision to bless any union should, and will always, rest with the clergy involved. Gay and lesbian advocacy groups strongly agree.

What some clergy do seek is the right to perform legally binding marriages of their choice—regardless of the gender of the marriage partners. Many religious congregations already perform rites for



"The Unitarian Universalist Association has a long-standing and deeply held religious commitment to support full equality for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people, and today's ruling is a significant step forward in guaranteeing that the rights enjoyed by heterosexual couples in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are also available to its bisexual, gay, lesbian and transgender citizens. ... Unitarian Universalists today celebrate this ruling, and we again dedicate ourselves to work for justice, grounded in faith, which calls us to support everyone's full humanity, everyone's ability to love, and everyone's value in the world."

—Rev. William Sinkford, President, Unitarian Universalist Church

same-sex couples, even though such unions are not legally recognized by the government. Some of these denominations include:

- American Baptists
- Buddhists
- Episcopalians
- Presbyterians
- Unitarian Universalists
- Methodists
- Reform, Reconstructionist and some Conservative Jews
- The United Church of Christ

… and others

The separation of church and state stands to prevent proponents of any religion from utilizing the government as a tool of tyranny over believers of a different faith. While every faith community must make its own decisions regarding morality and marriage, there should also be respect for the legal arguments brought forth by gays and lesbians.

Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Do black same-sex couples really want —or need—the option to legally marry?

There are many black gay and lesbian couples who wish to obtain a marriage license from the state of Maryland.

Khadijah Tribble, of Prince George's County, expresses the desire she and her partner, Robin Dickerson, have to marry:



"What Robin and I seek is no different than any other couple who met and fell in love—the ability to marry; raise a healthy, happy family; and take care of one another. We contemplate daily the extra burdens placed on our family, and how those burdens impede our ability to make very basic decisions. We want the same tax breaks (and headaches) afforded couples who have the right to marry. We want the comfort of knowing that should either of us suffer an untimely death, our family's quality of life would not be diminished. And we also want the security of knowing that the government will not tear apart the very family we've worked so hard to build, nurture and grow. Nothing more. Nothing less."

Black same-sex couples are already living married lives

Fourteen percent of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender Americans are black. Forty-five percent of black same-sex couples reported stable relationships of five years or longer on the U.S. Census. This figure rivals that of heterosexual couples.

Maryland is home to a thriving community of families headed by black lesbians and gay men. The Washington, D.C.-Baltimore area is home to 4,977 black same-sex households.

Taking it to Court: *Deane & Polyak v. Conaway*

Black same-sex couples are actively seeking the ability to legally marry in Maryland. On July 7, 2004, The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), working closely with Equality Maryland, an LGBT advocacy organization, filed a lawsuit *(Deane & Polyak vs. Conaway)* on behalf of nine same-sex couples and a recently-widowed man. The lawsuit charges that excluding same-sex couples from marriage violates the state constitution's guarantees of equality. (Lawsuit filed in the Circuit Court of Baltimore County, Maryland, July 7, 2004. Original complaint accessible at http://equalitymaryland.org/marriage-equality.htm)

"We cannot sit around talking about whose cross is bigger or who got more lashes. Oppression is oppression. When we play the 'hierarchy of oppression' game, people lose. The experience of one oppressed group is just as virulent and evil as the subjugation of another."



—Equality Maryland Field Organizer Meredith Moise, who is also an Independent Deacon in the Reform Catholic Church



Alvin Williams and Nigel Simon are one of three African American couples involved in the case.

"I have long felt as married as anyone who loves and lives with their spouse, raises kids, owns a home, and even drives a minivan," Nigel says. "Although we are a family in every way imaginable—a family with one military veteran and one federal employee—we are not fully protected as a family under the law."

Alvin, 49, is a dentist now in private practice after retiring from the U.S. Army where he was a dental officer. Nigel, 35, is a program manager for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Nigel previously served in the U.S. Army National Guard as a military police specialist. They live in Upper Marlboro in Prince George's County and have been together for seven years. Together, they are raising three adopted children who came from homes impacted by drug abuse.

Both Alvin and Nigel are active in community service, serving on the board of directors of Us Helping Us—an HIV/AIDS service organization committed to reducing HIV infection in the African American community. Alvin and Nigel also attend worship services and are welcomed as a family at Covenant Baptist Church. They met at a discussion group for black gay men. "It was love at first sight," Alvin says.

Is Marriage Equality a "Civil Right"?

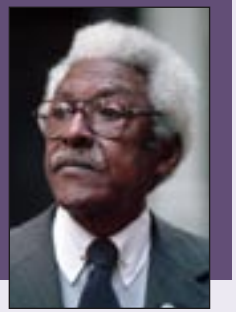
A fairly common definition of "civil right" looks something like this: the protections and privileges of personal liberty given to all U.S. citizens by the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights.

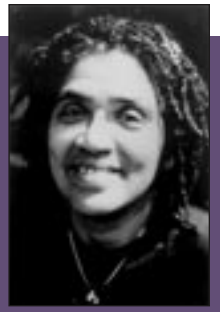
Some blacks are offended when gays and lesbians equate the same-sex marriage movement with the African American civil rights movement. When white gays and lesbians overshadow the voices of black gays and lesbians and discuss the ability to marry as a matter of "civil rights," some blacks may feel like the comparison diminishes the stain on our nation that has resulted from centuries of slavery, lynching, and segregation. We should remember, however, that many gays and lesbians are members of our community, the black community, and were an integral part of our black civil rights movement.

Many white gays and lesbians stood arm-and-arm with black Americans in Selma and Montgomery.

Charles Blackburn, along with his partner, Glen Dehn, is one of the nine couples in *Deane & Polyak v. Conaway.* Charles, 71, worked as director of field development for the ACLU in the 1960s and became a Unitarian minister in 1958. Charles was heavily involved in the civil rights movement in the South during this era.

Bayard Rustin (1912-87), Deputy Director of the 1963 March on Washington, was an openly homosexual black man. In his position as advisor to Dr. King he is credited as the true logistical mastermind of the event. Rustin initially began working with King during the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1956, and became a key movement strategist. Though the FBI pressured March organizers to abandon Rustin, they recognized the essential quality of his leadership and stood behind him. Rustin represents many black gay community members whose service to the extended black family has been indispensable.





"When I picketed for Welfare Mother's Rights, and against the enforced sterilization of young black girls, when I fought institutionalized racism in the New York City schools, I was a black lesbian. But you did not know it because we did not identify ourselves, so now you can say that black lesbians and gay men have nothing to do with the struggles of the Black Nation. And I am not alone. When you read the words of Langston Hughes you are reading the words of a black gay man. When you read the words of Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Angelina Weld Grimke', poets of the Harlem Renaissance, you are reading the words of black lesbians. When you listen to the life-affirming voices of Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, you are hearing black lesbian women. When you see the plays and read the words of Lorraine Hansberry, you are reading the words of a woman who loved women deeply."

—Audre Lorde (1934-92), visionary writer, from her essay entitled "I Am Your Sister."

Arguments against same-sex marriage today are very similar to those used decades ago to create and expand interracial marriage bans on both the state and Federal levels. Without trying to establish a hierarchy of which is worse, our country's civil rights laws place the prohibition against gender-based, racial, or religious discrimination into the same provisions.

Jumping the Broom

This is not the first time in our history that black men and women have been denied the ability to legally marry the person of our choice. Enslaved Africans were legally forbidden to marry. This discrimination was based on the racist argument that black people were not fully human, and were thus incapable of expressing love or commitment.

In the defiant spirit of love, black folk created ways to celebrate and bless their chosen unions. Many chose to continue the traditional African marriage custom of jumping the broom—a ritual symbolizing new life and commitment. Although they were not legally recognized, these traditional unions formed the foundations of strong families.

Same-sex couples already create strong, vibrant families. They live the lives of married couples, and are often blessed in their places of worship, creating commitment ceremonies and bonds of faith—just as the broom-jumpers of years past. But these families do not have access to the legal securities that accompany a marriage license. The ability to fulfill the dream we all have—to fall in love and marry—is not within the reach of black Marylanders who happen to be gay or lesbian.

The Evolution of Marriage in Maryland

Many people erroneously claim that marriage has always been "one way." In fact, the government's decisions about who has permission to marry have always changed with the times. The state of Maryland has made great shifts in its legal definition of marriage with respect to religion, gender, and race.

- Religion: It wasn't until 1963 that Maryland formally changed a statute that required couples to have ceremonies in Christian churches in order to make their weddings legal. Today, nearly 40 percent of couples opt for a civil ceremony only, with no accompanying religious blessing by a member of the clergy.

- Gender: In many states, including Maryland, married women had no legal standing until the middle of the 19th century. They could not own property, sign contracts, or legally control any wages they might earn. Only after adopting the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972 did Maryland begin to consider women equal partners in marriage.

- Race: In 1967, the ban on interracial marriage in Maryland—a legacy of slavery and Jim Crow—was finally lifted. *(Brief of Amicus Curiae, Gitanjali Deane and Lisa Polyak et al., Petitioners, vs. F. Conway et al., Respondents. Circuit Court for Baltimore City, June 14, 2005).*

Has Marriage Always Been One Man-One Woman?

The Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association, the world's largest organization of anthropologists, the people who study culture, released the following statement in response to President Bush's call for a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage.

"I still hear people say that I should not be talking about the rights of lesbian and gay people and I should stick to the issue of racial justice. But I hasten to remind them that Martin Luther King Jr. said, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.' 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." (Reuters, 3/31/98)

"Gays and lesbians stood up for civil rights in Montgomery, Selma, in Albany, Ga. and St. Augustine, Fla., and many other campaigns of the Civil Rights Movement. Many of these courageous men and women were fighting for my freedom at a time when they could find few voices for their own, and I salute their contributions." (Chicago Tribune, 4/1/98)

—Coretta Scott King, Civil Rights Leader



"The results of more than a century of anthropological research on households, kinship relationships, and families, across cultures and through time, provide no support whatsoever for the view that either civilization or viable social orders depend upon marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution. Rather, anthropological research supports the conclusion that a vast array of family types, including families built upon same-sex partnerships, can contribute to stable and humane societies."

Many people are unaware that from the 5th to the 14th centuries, the Roman Catholic Church conducted special ceremonies to bless same-sex unions that were almost identical to those that bless heterosexual unions. At the very least, these were spiritual, if not sexual, unions.

Why Not Civil Unions or Domestic Partnerships?

Several states grant protections to same-sex couples. Massachusetts grants marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Vermont and Connecticut grant civil union licenses to same-sex couples. And California, New Jersey, Hawaii, the District of Columbia, and Maine grant some protections to same-sex couples who register domestic partnerships. None of these legal relationships are recognized by the state of Maryland, or by the federal government.

Only Marriage Provides Full Legal Equality

The word "marriage" is the gateway to the 1,138 federal protections afforded to married couples. Without that word, same-sex couples in civil unions or domestic partnerships have no claim for those legal protections. While those federal protections are presently withheld from married couples of the same-sex from Massachusetts, many in the LGBT community believe that this discrimination will not stand the test of time.

"Marriage equality is not about special rights for special people. It's about equal rights for all people. The denial of basic human rights is a form of oppression. The complacent, the entrenched, the privileged cannot continue to tremble at the prospect of change in the status quo."

—Rickie Green, founder of The Portal, Baltimore's Black LGBT Community Center



A marriage license provides protections that are crucial for families, including:

- Access to family courts for dissolution of relationships
- Death benefits for surviving spouses of firefighters and police officers
- Mutual responsibility for debts
- The ability to sponsor a foreign-born partner for a green card
- Joint assessment of income for determining eligibility for state government assistance programs
- Child custody, visitation, and duties of financial support to children
- Right to inherit a spouse's pension
- Entitlement to inherit social security and disability benefits upon the death of a spouse
- Ability to inherit jointly owned property without incurring tax penalties
- Right to file joint income taxes
- Ability to put a spouse on the deed to a home without incurring tax penalties
- Access to "family memberships"
- Domestic violence protections
- Immunity from testifying against a spouse
- Right to sue for wrongful death of a spouse

Civil unions end at the state line

While civil unions in Connecticut and Vermont do provide state-level benefits of marriage to same-sex couples who live in those states, those benefits end at the state line. A Vermont couple with a civil union license are virtual legal strangers once they cross the state line. They could still be denied the right to visit each other in the hospital in New Hampshire or Delaware. While marriages of same-sex couples will face discrimination in some places, marriages are advantaged over civil unions because all states have a marriage system.

Civil unions and domestic partnerships create a legal quagmire

By fabricating a separate institution rather than just granting a marriage license to same-sex couples, the state is creating a legal quagmire. Case in point: a couple in Vermont, Connecticut or Massachusetts needs to file joint state taxes and separate federal taxes. There are problems determining qualification for aid programs and other government benefits. And because Vermont recognizes a civil union but Virginia does not, courts in these states are actually fighting each other over who in a couple should receive custody of their daughter.



"The president vowed to 'do what is legally necessary to defend the sanctity of marriage.' He did not explain precisely how gays and lesbians are attacking the sanctity of marriage by wishing to be bound by it. In fact, same-sex marriages are not likely to have any impact on the sanctity of the president's marriage or my marriage or any other heterosexual's marriage. My wife and I would still be married and so would the president and the first lady—for better or worse, in sickness and in health, 'til death do us part, etc., etc." (Chicago Tribune, 12/03/03)

—Clarence Page, Columnist

Civil unions create a burden on businesses

By calling a relationship a "civil union," a self-insured employer (and that includes most large employers) would have to amend its plans to include civil union spouses whereas married spouses would automatically be covered under self-insured plans that defer to a state-law definition of who is married.

Civil unions are separate and unequal

By fabricating a new license for same-sex couples, a state that passes civil unions is sending a negative message: setting gay families apart and denying them access to the same license all other families receive.

In its opinion about the constitutionality of a civil union bill, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court stated:

The bill's absolute prohibition of the use of the word "marriage" by "spouses" who are the same-sex is more than semantic. The dissimilitude between the terms "civil marriage" and "civil union" is not innocuous; it is a considered choice of language that reflects a demonstrable assigning of same-sex, largely homosexual, couples to second-class status. ... For no rational reason the marriage laws of the Commonwealth discriminate against a defined class; no amount of tinkering with language will eradicate that stain. The bill would have the effect of maintaining and fostering a stigma of exclusion that the Constitution prohibits. It would deny to same-sex "spouses" only a status that is specially recognized in society and has significant social and other advantages.

Marriage is more than the sum of its legal parts

Because it is a social, cultural and legal institution, access to marriage provides protections to the married family on each of those levels. The word is itself a protection because others understand that when you are married you are a family. For some, being married allows them to express externally the nature of the commitment they feel internally. Marriages receive widespread respect.

Maryland's Treatment of Gay and Lesbian Couples

Same-sex couples in Maryland, no matter how long they have been together, are essentially strangers in the eyes of state law. Their children have two parents with no legalized relationship to one another.

Because they are not "family," a same-sex couple has no uncontestable right to visit each other in the hospital. There is no power of attorney or advanced directive for hospital visitation in Maryland.

A bill passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 2005, the Medical Decision Making Act, would have granted unmarried couples who register as partners with the state the same healthcare and post-mortem decision-making rights as married couples. Most of the rights in the bill could not have been accomplished through advanced directives or powers of attorney. The bill was widely supported in the General Assembly. Nevertheless, Governor Robert L. Ehrlich vetoed the legislation, stating that the bill threatens "the sanctity of traditional marriage."

Inequality for Public Servants

Due to overwhelming pressure from a majority of citizens in our state, Maryland enacted a law in 2001 that protects individuals from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in housing, employment, public accommodations, and real estate.

Because it treats same-sex couples like strangers, the state of Maryland is free to discriminate against its gay and lesbian employees by denying domestic partner benefits while offering spousal benefits.

Twenty percent of black men and 24 percent of black women in same-sex households in the Maryland area work in the public sector.

Studies have shown that benefits comprise nearly 40 percent of overall compensation. Without domestic partner benefits, a significant portion of overall compensation is unattainable for gay and lesbian workers.

Two-hundred and four Fortune 500 companies offer domestic partner benefits to their employees, including Maryland-based Lockheed Martin, Allegheny Energy, and Marriott International. One-hundred twenty-one city and county governments also offer these benefits, including Montgomery and Howard counties, and the cities of Baltimore, College Park, Greenbelt, Hyattsville, Mount Rainier, Rockville and Takoma Park.

The State government is lagging behind.

Sadly, even when health insurance benefits are offered to domestic partners, the employee taking advantage of these benefits is taxed on the benefits by both the state and federal governments.

Since same-sex couples cannot obtain a marriage license, public servants also lose out on the option of using Family and Medical Leave to care for a sick partner and extending COBRA benefits.

"I believe this is a civil rights issue ... My aunt married a white man in the 1950s when their marriage was illegal in half the states of this country. Indeed, my uncle, had he taken his wife across the wrong state line, would have been guilty of a criminal violation. It seems to me that if people want to marry a person of a different race, that's no different than somebody wanting to marry someone of the same sex." (Democratic Debate, Des Moines, IA, 11/24/03)

—Carol Moseley Braun



Same-Sex Marriage and Maryland

Maryland's Family Code currently states that marriage in this state is between a man and a woman. The plaintiffs in *Deane & Polyak v.*



"Local NAACP branches are opposed to any kind of tampering of the Maryland Constitution in the name of banning the legalization of gay and lesbian unions. A constitutional amendment attacks some of the most basic fibers that the constitution was founded upon, and an amendment would have devastating effects for many in our communities. If critics of gay rights start to take out one group of people, what will stop them from taking out the rights of other groups of people next? This constitutional ban effort would be no better than some of the Jim Crow laws and segregation acts that were in some state constitutions in the late 1800s/early 1900s. The NAACP believes that basic human and civil rights need to be protected."

—Elbridge G. James, Second Vice-President and Chair, Political Action Committee, Maryland State NAACP

Conaway believe that this law denies their families equal protection under the law.

Some legislators, like Del. Emmett Burns (D-Baltimore County), have tried to pass discriminatory and redundant "defense of marriage" laws. Other legislators are pushing to write discrimination into the Maryland Constitution and deny gay couples access to the judicial branch of government.

These attempts to use the law to deny protections to families headed by same-sex couples have thus far been rejected by the Maryland General Assembly. However, in the event that the courts in Maryland find that same-sex couples have a constitutional right to a marriage license, there will be a strong push to write discrimination into the Maryland constitution and take away this right.

Interracial Marriage Bans vs. Same-Sex Marriage Bans

In 1948, the California State Supreme Court became the first in the country to strike down its interracial marriage ban. At that time, the number of people who opposed marriage for interracial couples was alarmingly high. In fact, if we compare polling attitudes, we see that far more people opposed interracial marriage in 1948, and for decades to follow, than the number of people who opposed same-sex marriage in 2003 (when Massachusetts' Supreme Court issued its ruling in favor of same-sex marriage).

The parallels are great.

Public opinion was against black Americans' right to marry the person of our choice if our spouse's race was different than our own, and many states changed their constitutions to protest the 1948 California ruling.

Thankfully, all attempts to amend the U.S. Constitution to ban interracial marriage failed.

"Whatever my personal feelings may be about gay and lesbian marriages, unless you are prepared to say gays and lesbians are not human beings, they should have the same constitutional right of any other human being."

—Rev. Al Sharpton, founder of the Harlem-based National Action Network



In 1911 Rep. Seaborn Roddenberry of Georgia introduced a U.S. constitutional amendment to ban interracial marriage. In his appeal to Congress, Roddenberry stated that:

"Intermarriage between whites and blacks is repulsive and averse to every sentiment of pure American spirit. It is abhorrent and repugnant. It is subversive to social peace. It is destructive of moral supremacy."

In 1967, the interracial marriage bans still on the books in a number of states were finally struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Loving v. Virginia.* The Lovings were an interracial Virginia couple that had married in Washington, D.C., then returned to Virginia, where their marriage was illegal. They were arrested and convicted to a year in jail. The trial judge suspended the sentence for a period of 25 years on the condition that the Lovings leave the state and not return for 25 years.

When sentencing them, the Virginia judge stated that:

"Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and He placed them on separate continents. And but for the interference with His arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that He separated the races shows that He did not intend for the races to mix."

Many people invoke "God's plan" when advocating for a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage.

No matter what we feel about same-sex marriage, is it okay to change a constitution to tell gays and lesbians that the equal protection clause in that constitution applies to everyone but them?

Is Marriage a Constitutional Right?

One of our most fundamental rights as citizens of the United States of America is the ability to marry, and the ability to marry the person of our choice. Courts in this country have determined that the right to marry is, in some cases, more fundamental than the right to vote. It cannot be denied:

- on the basis of an individual's race;
- to those who have shown themselves to be delinquent on child welfare payments;
- to hardened criminals in prison.

Every day, however, tax-paying, law-abiding gays and lesbians who love and cherish each other and their children are denied the ability to protect their families with a marriage license.

The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution extends "equal protection of the laws" to all citizens. The Maryland Constitution also has an "equal protection" clause, and specifically prohibits gender-based

"The NAACP vigorously opposes President George W. Bush's attempt to pass a federal constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. ... We also oppose state-level attempts to do the same thing. … There is no such thing as a moderate or 'compromise' amendment that in any way enshrines treating one group of people differently than others." (letter to Massachusetts State Senate, 3/8/04)

—Julian Bond, chairman of the NAACP



discrimination. The intent of both the U.S. and Maryland constitutions is distorted when we discriminate on the basis of gender in the issuance of marriage licenses and treat some families differently than others.

Courts in Hawaii, Alaska, Oregon, Washington, California, Vermont, New York and Massachusetts have found that same-sex couples have a constitutional right to marriage licenses or the protections that stem from them. Those who fight to write gays and lesbians out of the Maryland Constitution are actually recognizing that the ability to marry someone of the same gender is likely a constitutionally-protected right in Maryland—a right they would like to take away.

Amending the Maryland Constitution undermines everyone's freedom.

We must reject the attempt to use our Constitution to establish discriminatory policies. It is our history as African Americans that dictates this consciousness.

Dangers of a Constitutional Amendment

■ Passage of the constitutional amendment would deny access to the judicial branch of government to a diverse group of citizens. It says to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender citizens of Maryland—and their children—that they must accept government's judgment of them as second-class citizens.

■ We must not send the message that one group can simply change the constitution to bar another group from their rights because of ideological differences. This would undermine the very purpose of having a constitution.

■ No group of citizens' rights should ever be up for a popular vote. It was wrong after the 1948 California decision, and it is wrong today.

Black legislators and community leaders have recognized the crucial importance of protecting our Constitution from the assault that is the proposed ban on marriage between same-sex couples.

In Georgia, black members of the State House of Representatives provided 39 of the 50 votes that were needed to defeat a state constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriages.

In Mississippi, black legislators cast the only 17 votes against a similar measure.

Every major civil rights organization in the country recognizes the importance of protecting our constitutional freedoms by opposing these amendments. Among them are:

NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund
NAACP
American Civil Liberties Union
Anti-Defamation League
League of United Latin American Citizens
League of Women Voters of the United States
United Farm Workers Union
Alliance of Baptists
American Friends Service Committee (Quaker)
American Jewish Committee
United Church of Christ
Central Conference of American Rabbis
Episcopal Church, U.S.A.
Friends Committee on National Legislation (Quaker)
Guru Gobind Singh Foundation (Sikh)
Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
National Conference for Community and Justice
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Washington Office
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington

"In a place like California, you can not possibly work for rights if you don't work for gay rights. You either believe in the rights of everyone or you are in the wrong business."

—Alice A. Huffman, NAACP California Conference president, announcing support for a same-sex marriage bill



Where Does the Black Community Stand?

As African Americans, our feelings about sexuality vary greatly. But the reality is that our government is NOT allowed to decide for consenting adults what is "acceptable" when it comes to love and intimacy. Those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender deserve an honored place in our communities, free from pressure to "assimilate" into heterosexuality or disappear.

There are challenging questions for black heterosexuals who are uncomfortable with homosexuality:

Can gays and lesbians change?

Information from professionals in the field of mental health tells us that sexual orientation is not a choice like other aspects of our lives, such as the choice of career path or religious membership. The American Psychological Association, along with the American Psychiatric Association and American Counseling Association, has issued a statement which represents the consensus among virtually all mainstream healthcare professionals:

"For nearly three decades, it has been known that homosexuality is not a mental illness. Medical and mental health professionals also now know that sexual orientation is not a choice and cannot be altered. Groups who try to change the sexual orientation of people through so-called "conversion therapy" are misguided and run the risk of causing a great deal of psychological harm to those they say they are trying to help."

Over the past three decades, groups promising to "heal," "change" or "save" gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people from their sexual orientation or gender identity have been striving to build their clout and influence in religious and political circles. That is especially true in Maryland, where anti-gay political extremists align themselves closely with "ex-gay" ministries like Exodus International.

Outside of being inaccurate in the facts that they use to support their position that one can actually change one's sexual orientation, these programs have been denounced by every legitimate mental health association as unhealthy and even potentially dangerous for those who enroll.

Those claiming to be "ex-gays" have every right to state what is in their hearts. What they should not do, however, is lie about where every major medical and psychological organization stands on the issue. They should not use their supposedly-converted sexual orientation to advocate writing discrimination into the Maryland Constitution.

As Nigel Simon, one of the black Marylanders suing for the right to marry, said: "I'm black by God and I'm gay by God."

Should I support laws that deny gay and lesbian couples the right to enjoy the benefits of marriage?

Refusing to allow a same-sex couple and their children the protections that accompany a marriage license will not serve to convert people to heterosexuality any more than denying blacks the right to vote or equal access to education has succeeded in obliterating our rich cultural heritage. Changing a constitution to restrict the rights of a group of people will not erase their families. Policies that deny civil rights for gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual folk will only serve to create a state of inequality based on personal bias rather than on the principle of reverence for human diversity.

Should a black woman be discriminated against on the basis of her race, her sex, or the fact that she loves another woman? Must a black man be

stigmatized for the fact that he loves another black man?

Sexual orientation is an integral aspect of our individual identities: an aspect that we cannot simply cast off as we do our daily garments. Are we prepared to live in a society that punishes its members—not for harming others, but simply for loving "the wrong" person? The call to love is the strongest human urge, and love should be a cause for celebration. When two adults love each other deeply, they want to express their feelings. The fact that this love may express itself sexually should not logically be a source of fear.

Shouldn't gay people be willing to accept the consequences of their lifestyle choice?

Most gay people argue that they do not have lifestyles, just lives. They do not choose their sexual orientation; they simply choose to live their lives honestly. Even if we entertain the widely debunked notion that sexuality is a choice, isn't choosing who to love the same type of intimate decision as choosing a religion to follow—and does it not thus merit the same protection? In our society there are certain choices that are protected by civil rights legislation, such as the free exercise of religion. One is free to choose the path of Christianity, Islam, or of any faith, and the integrity of the U.S. Constitution must uphold our right to make that choice without fear of discrimination.

How can I accept my family member or friend who has a relationship that I wish he/she did not have?

Often our own truth—clear as it is to us—may contradict that of our loved ones. This is true on matters ranging from religion and economics to sexuality and politics. Compassion allows us to realize that the feelings of others are just as strong and undeniable as ours. Black heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals have all come to know their own hearts through a process of self-realization. When we recognize that and move with compassion, we are able to build the mutual respect necessary for dialogue.

How can I acknowledge the relationship of a same-sex couple? How should I acknowledge their children?

The decision to commit to building a family with someone does not come easily. Once individuals have made that commitment, pressure to change their hearts and minds can lead to isolation and the cutting of family ties. If we allow personal beliefs about homosexuality to bias us against our loved ones, who is really winning? If instead we extend ourselves with love, we can find an acceptance that renews our relationships and opens the path to dialogue.

If we support gay people, are we condoning the spread of AIDS?

AIDS is a sexually-transmitted disease; anyone who engages in unprotected sex or other high-risk behavior can contract HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Currently, the fastest-growing rate of HIV infection in black communities is of black women—many of whom are infected through heterosexual contact with black men. Media hype irresponsibly throws around phrases like "on the down low," increasing homophobic responses to the crisis of HIV.

It is true that homophobia in the African American community encourages some black men to remain in the closet and lie to their wives while engaging in risky sex with other men. When homophobia is diminished and people are able to acknowledge their unions, they will be more likely to form healthy and stable relationships. Marriage—whether between heterosexuals or same-sex couples—promotes monogamy.

Why should we support a lifestyle that we don't condone?

Our history as African Americans mandates that we be vigilant over the human rights of all people. We cannot afford to allow forces of repression to divide us on the basis of sexuality. Unity is essential in our work to empower black communities. One does not have to "condone" homosexuality to realize that it's wrong to twist a constitution to take away people's rights. One does not have to "condone" homosexuality to believe that all children deserve the same family protections—regardless of the sexuality of their parents.

Same-Sex Marriage and the Protection of Children

In Maryland and across the nation, gay and lesbian couples are raising healthy children in an atmosphere of love. These may be biological children, children of family members, adopted or foster children who may not otherwise have the love of two parents. In many cases, gay couples take in children that no one else will care for—those who have been abandoned by our child welfare system, who were born with HIV, or who face a challenging disability.

Are gays and lesbians fit to be parents?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), comprised of more than 60,000 pediatricians across the country, passed a policy in 2002 in support of laws that allow a parent to adopt a same-sex partner's child. The position was based on evidence of children's healthy development in families headed by loving, committed same-sex couples.

Research conducted by the AAP concluded that there is more similarity than difference in the parenting of heterosexual and homosexual mothers and fathers:

■ "Compared with heterosexual fathers, gay fathers have been described to adhere to stricter disciplinary guidelines, to place greater emphasis on guidance and the development of cognitive skills, and to be more involved in their children's activities. Overall, there are more similarities than differences in the parenting styles and attitudes of gay and non-gay fathers."

■ "Lesbian mothers strongly endorse child-centered attitudes and commitment to their maternal roles and have been shown to be more concerned with providing male role models for their children than are divorced heterosexual mothers."

According to the American Psychological Association, "not a single study has found children of lesbian or gay parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents." Teachers surveyed about their students' development have noted equal levels of social competence among youth of same-sex partners and heterosexual couples.
Studies have found that children raised by two parents as opposed to one parent may have an advantage. Above all, however, children need to be nurtured in structured homes by parents and extended family that treat the children and each other with respect. Parenting potential is made up of many factors, including the key elements of self-esteem and self-acceptance.

Are children of gay parents more likely to be gay?

By all indications, the sexual orientation of parents does not determine their ability to nurture young people—nor does it determine the sexuality of their children. Studies have shown that young people raised by homosexual parents are no more likely than those raised by heterosexual parents to develop same-sex attractions.

In a speech given in Memphis, Tennessee in March of 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King spoke to the heart of the matter: "It seems that I can hear the God of the universe saying, 'The children of my sons and daughters were in need of economic security and you didn't provide it for them. And so you cannot enter the kingdom of greatness.' This may well be the indictment on America. And that same voice says, 'If you do it unto the least of these of my children you do it unto me.'"



—Clayborne Carson, editor, "The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr." MLK Papers Project

Lisa Kebreau and her partner Mikki Mozelle, of Riverdale *(pictured below with one of their two sons),* are also participants in Maryland's same-sex marriage lawsuit, *Deane and Polyak vs. Conway.* Lisa was born and raised in Maryland.

"We want our boys to understand that marriage can be the foundation for a stable home and the love of two parents," says Lisa.

"We want our boys to feel accepted by society. We want them to know there is nothing unworthy at all about our family, and that having two mommies dote on them is the same as having a mommy and daddy. We just want to be able to marry and have the same benefits and protections as any other parents."

Mikki, 29, is the ad traffic manager for WTTG Channel 5 and WDCA Channel 20. Lisa, 37, is a teacher with the Prince George's County public school system. They live in Riverdale in Prince George's County and have been together for over three years. They are raising a 15-year-old son from Lisa's former marriage and baby Noah, whom Lisa gave birth to after the filing of the lawsuit. Lisa and Mikki are expanding their family once again, and expect a third child in December 2005.



Marriage is important to Mikki and Lisa, not just for its legal protections and benefits, but also so their children can appreciate the value of family and commitment.

The Least of These: Marriage Discrimination Harms Children

Some feel that marriage must remain an institution only open to heterosexual couples, claiming that it is designed to foster child-bearing and child-rearing. While stable marriages do provide support for children, we must question the universal application of this argument. In actuality, no heterosexual couple would be denied the right to marry for love if they were incapable—or simply not desiring—of producing children. The institution of legal marriage offers partners the freedom to provide for each other in life and in death—whether or not they have children.

Denying the stability of legal marriage to families headed by same-sex couples means we as a society fail to protect "the least of these"—our children. While many claim that denying same-sex couples the ability to marry is protecting children, the opposite is true.

The majority of black households in the Maryland metropolitan area headed by female same-sex couples are raising children, as are 41 percent of black male same-sex couples.

Gays and lesbians are routinely recognized by the state of Maryland as healthy caregivers to their birth, adopted or foster children.

However, the children in these families are denied the protections available to children of married parents because the government refuses to grant their parents a marriage license.

Children should not be denied the right to have a legal relationship with both parents. Marriage would allow a family to provide an official relationship and establish essential protections for the children in the case of loss of one or both of the parents.

Children of same-sex couples are often separated from one parent when the other parent passes away, even when that non-biological parent has raised him or her since birth. Social Security benefits or inheritances from that parent are unavailable to the child without the legal status of parent.

Second Parent Adoptions

While some same-sex couples in Maryland are sometimes able to formalize a "second-parent" adoption so that their child has a legal relationship with both parents, this option is not guaranteed to all couples. If same-sex marriage were legal, second-parent adoption would be available to all step-parents or co-parents to become a legally-recognized family member and guardian of a child he/she is raising along with the child's primary biological or adoptive parent.

Joint Adoptions

In Maryland, no same-sex couple can adopt a child together. Marriage would allow couples that want to give a home to a parentless child the option of adopting together. Second-parent adoptions cost thousands of dollars and force a couple to unnecessarily repeat the adoption process twice. Gay couples often care for the children that society casts away. Why would we make it harder to provide these children with stable, loving homes?

Marriage protects the economic interests of children by providing an economic safety net to their families, and to the kids themselves. For instance:

- Children who have a legalized relationship with both parents have automatic and undisputed access to the resources, benefits and entitlements of both parents.

- Married couples do not have to incur any expenses, legal or otherwise, to ensure that both parents have the right to make important medical decisions for their children in case of emergency.

- The children of legally-married couples are automatically eligible for health benefits from both parents, as well as child support and visitation from both parents in the event of separation.

- If one of the parents in a marriage dies, the law provides financial security not only for the surviving spouse, but for the children as well, by ensuring eligibility to all appropriate entitlements, such as Social Security survivor benefits.

- The parents' marriage would allow them to receive health benefits under an employer's family plan, and to take leave to care for one another in case of illness.

When Separation Occurs

Can you imagine what it would be like for the child of a marriage—heterosexual parents—if there were no rules regarding custody, childcare, or child support? Without legal marriage for same-sex couples, there are no rules for ending a relationship while protecting both parties and the children. There are no rules for child support or childcare. These are risky hardships that our children should not have to endure.

In February 2002, the American Academy of Pediatrics passed a resolution calling for full legal recognition of same-sex relationships, recognizing the significant disadvantages for the children of same-sex couples.

The love and care exhibited by individuals who self-define as family should not be legally rejected by society. Such rejection does nothing to strengthen our own families. When we overcome this, we will be much closer to creating a society which truly cares for "the least of these."

Marriage Discrimination: Particularly Harmful to Black Families

"Like with most civil injustices, marriage inequality falls particularly hard on those living on the margins: the poor, less educated, immigrants, the elderly, the ill and those otherwise most vulnerable," says Evan Wolfson of Freedom to Marry.

A landmark study of African American lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people in the U.S., *Say It Loud: I'm black and I'm Proud,* released in March 2002 by the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, found that ending the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage would provide especially significant protections to LGBT people of color.

The median annual income level for black same-sex couples who are raising children hovers around $40,000. This is less than their white gay and lesbian counterparts.

The inability to marry creates significant problems with:

Coping financially after the death of a partner

Even the lowest wage workers, if legally employed, pay to support the Social Security system. Unmarried partners, though, cannot receive the Social Security survivor benefits that married partners do, and may therefore be left without any means of supporting themselves.

Accessing healthcare

According to the Current Population Survey, one in five African Americans (20 percent) lacked health insurance, based on a three-year average from 1998 through 2000. Allowing same-sex couples to marry would extend Medicare and Medicaid spousal benefits and would allow for the tax-free provision of benefits by an employer to the same-sex partner of an employee.

Accessing veterans' and military medical care benefits for partners

Twenty-one percent of men and 10 percent of women in black same-sex couples are military veterans who served bravely in our country's armed forces, despite threats of discharge under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

Receiving governmental support

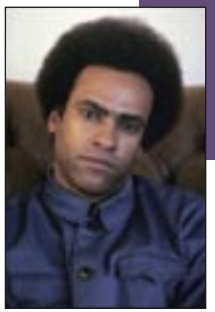
Married, heterosexual couple-led families should not be favored over other types of families in determining eligibility for any government-funded service, including welfare benefits and limited supply benefits such as Head Start slots, student financial aid, public housing, or job training.

Securing housing benefits

Same-sex couples do not receive the protections of joint rental leases with automatic renewal rights. In highly competitive public housing slots, families can lose their homes. Only fifty-seven percent of black male same-sex couples and 55 percent of black female same-sex couples own their own home.

Dealing with medical emergencies

Living wills and powers of attorney are intricate and expensive legal documents to draft, and don't solve most problems. Marriage eliminates the need for any legal documents because spouses are not only allowed, but indeed expected, to make these important decisions for one another.



"Homosexuals are not given freedom and liberty by anyone in the society. Maybe they might be the most oppressed people in the society."

—Black Panther Huey Newton, in a 1970 article encouraging the black liberation movement to unite in coalition with the women's and gay civil rights movements

Marriage Discrimination Breaks Up Families

More than 10 percent of black same-sex households include a partner born outside the U.S. The ability to marry can impact these families and their children greatly—in some cases determining their ability to stay together.

Because same-sex couples cannot marry, one cannot sponsor a partner from another country for a Permanent Resident Card to stay in the United States and eventually become a U.S. citizen.

■ Current U.S. law forces thousands of same-sex couples to be separated or live in constant fear of being stopped by officials who demand to see documentation and threaten detention. Many U.S. citizens are sometimes left with no other choice but to migrate with their partners to a country with more fair-minded immigration laws.

■ The United States lags behind the following 15 countries that recognize same-sex couples for immigration purposes: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Israel, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The children of black same-sex parents are more likely than those of married parents to be forced to relocate or to live without their parents. Should people be forced to choose between the love of their life and their country, families, and livelihoods?

Takia Foskey and Jo Rabb, plaintiffs in *Deane and Polyak vs. Conway,* represent many black same-sex couples in Maryland whose needs for health care and for legal marriage are inextricably linked. Takia, 30, is an administrative assistant for a hospital laundry services company. Jo, 38, is a Baltimore city bus driver for the Maryland Transit Authority. They live in Baltimore and have been a family for several years. They recently had a commitment ceremony. They are raising Takia's biological children—a 12-year-old daughter and a seven-year-old son.

In 2003, Jo was overcome with pain while driving her bus route and was taken to St. Agnes Hospital. She was given painkillers that made her unable to understand much of what the medical staff was telling her. Takia was denied access to Jo, information about Jo's condition, and a place in the family waiting room. Other family members who couldn't be present, including Jo and Takia's children and Jo's elderly mother, desperately asked Takia for information she couldn't give them because the hospital staff didn't regard Takia as a "family member." Jo's emergency gallbladder operation was made even worse by her inability to have Takia at her side, advocating on her behalf.

Neither Takia nor her children have health insurance. As an employee of the State of Maryland, Jo cannot enroll Takia or the children in the state health plan, since Takia and Jo are virtual strangers under the law. Takia does not have her own health insurance because her part-time job does not offer it, and the job does not pay Takia enough to afford private health insurance. Takia and the children had received health care through Medicaid, but Takia now has a job and is no longer eligible.

Takia's son has asthma, which has forced Takia and Jo to struggle with whether or not they can afford medical care for their son. The couple also worries that if anything happened to Jo on her bus route, Takia and the children would not receive death benefits that are available to help the surviving families of MTA employees killed on the job.



Takia and Jo hope to marry so that their family has the same protections all other families take for granted.

Marriage Inequality Affects the Health of Black Families

Love is strong medicine.

There is a well-documented correlation between marriage and health status. The peace of mind fostered by loving commitment actually increases general well-being.

On the more practical side, partners often depend on each other for health insurance. Without access to health insurance, early intervention of diseases and emergency care may be too little too late. In the case of illness, it is always beneficial to have a trusted partner who can communicate with doctors and provide bedside comfort. Currently, because they are unable to legally marry, same-sex couples in many states—including Maryland—often suffer for the lack of these health-related privileges, such as the right to:

- Visit a partner in a hospital intensive care unit or during restricted, "family-only" visiting hours.
- Travel with a partner in an ambulance.
- Share a room in nursing homes.
- Honor a partner's last wishes regarding organ donation, burial or other final arrangements.
- In the absence of written instructions, make health care decisions for an incapacitated domestic partner.
- Make organ/tissue donations/anatomical gifts of a deceased partner.

- Receive Medicare and disability benefits.
- Receive family rates for health insurance.
- Receive consumer discounts and incentives for medical services offered only to married couples or families.
- Take Family Leave to care for your partner or partner's child during an illness.
- Take bereavement leave if your partner or one of your partner's close relatives dies.

"It is not a matter of whether one is heterosexual or homosexual, what matters is commitment. I would rather the Maryland General Assembly focus on education, healthcare and economic development issues than what happens in the privacy of one's bedroom. It's a matter of civil rights!"

—Adrienne Jones, Speaker Pro Tem Delegate (D-Baltimore County)



America is Behind the Times



Societies across the globe are confronting the issue of discrimination in marriage and rights for same-sex couples. Canada has recently joined Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands in legalizing marriage between same-sex couples.

All over the world, more countries than ever are implementing relationship recognition laws for same-sex couples. Several countries in the world grant legal recognition to same-sex couples through registered partnerships that are equivalent or nearly equivalent to marriage. These countries include:

- Iceland
- Finland
- Denmark
- France
- Germany
- Greenland
- Norway
- Sweden
- Switzerland

Other countries grant protections that are also available to heterosexual couples automatically after a specified period of cohabitation. These countries include:

- Argentina (certain provinces)
- Australia
- Croatia
- Hungary
- New Zealand
- Portugal
- Scotland
- South Africa

Lisa Kebreau expresses the importance of marriage for same-sex families: "We're in this for the long haul, just like my grandparents were," she says. "When they passed on, there was no question—they were married. My parents, aunts, and uncles got to keep the house they grew up in because it was protected by the marriage laws. I want that for my children. I want them to know where home is."

"The fact that black same-sex couples are almost as likely as black married opposite-sex couple to have lived in the same home for the previous five years is a good indication that our relationships are stable and long-term."

—Mandy Carter, Executive Director, Southerners on New Ground



Conclusion

Fundamentally, marriage equality for same-sex couples will provide legal recognition to committed relationships that already exist. Far from a new phenomenon, relationships between black same-sex couples have thrived over many generations, built on the same foundation that sustains any solid union: trust, loyalty, and love.

Black same-sex couples in Maryland and all over our country have chosen to join together in both body and soul. By partnering for life, these couples enter a covenant made sacred by their faith in each other. It is imperative that this covenant be respected and granted the legal status it deserves.

"We have to stand up and speak up in order to remove any of the remaining barriers that would deny us the enjoyment of the health, wealth, and happiness offered us by this great country of ours. So we stand here today to advocate for legislation that is right for all Marylanders and for the removal of any impediments to equal protections under the law for all Americans. We must stand up and we must speak up!"

—Rufus Clanzy has been the Human Rights Administrator for Howard County, Maryland since January 1998. He is a decorated war veteran, a recipient of the NAACP Distinguished Service Award, and an Ordained Deacon at First Baptist Church of Guilford in Columbia. At Equality Maryland's Rally for Equality on February 14, 2005, he spoke with conviction on the importance of equality for everyone, including black LGBT members of our communities.





About the Authors

Equality Maryland Foundation

Equality Maryland Foundation is Maryland's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender civil rights organization, with thousands of members across the entire state. Our mission is to make life better for LGBT Marylanders. For more information: www.EqualityMaryland.org. The LGBT Marylanders of Color Collective, a subcommittee of Equality Maryland, engages lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities of color and its allies in the movement for equality and social justice through visibility, political advocacy, religious dialogue and grassroots education in order to increase awareness and improve the quality of life for LGBT people and their families. For more information, visit: www.EqualityMaryland.org/MOCC.

Sandra J. Schmidt, Acting President
Dan Furmansky, Executive Director
Khadijah Tribble, Chair, Marylanders of Color Collective

National Black Justice Coalition

The National Black Justice Coalition is a civil rights organization of black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and our allies. We are dedicated to fostering equality by fighting racism and homophobia. The Coalition advocates for social justice by educating and mobilizing opinion leaders—including elected officials, clergy, and media—with a focus on black communities. The National Black Justice Coalition envisions a world where all people are fully empowered to participate safely, openly and honestly in family, faith and community, regardless of race, gender-identity or sexual orientation. For more information, visit: www.nbjcoalition.org.

Keith Boykin, President, Board of Directors
H. Alexander Robinson, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer

Joint Efforts

In addition to producing *Jumping the Broom: A Black Perspective on Same-Gender Marriage,* Equality Maryland and the National Black Justice Coalition have sponsored "town meeting" events aimed at creating dialogue on homophobia, marriage, and the role of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in the black church. The events have been held at places like Morgan State University and Bowie Christian Community Presbyterian Church. Equality Maryland and the National Black Justice Coalition will continue tackling these issues, creating critical dialogue and building community. To learn more, email info@EqualityMaryland.org.

Resources for Further Information

Each of us has a responsibility to stand for justice. The National Black Justice Coalition and Equality Maryland have compiled the following resource list to assist individuals interested in exploring the issue of marriage equality. The following publications, community centers, and websites listed specifically serve African American communities.

As we educate ourselves, let us continue to dialogue across our differences, in hopes that together we will achieve justice for all of our families.

Community Organizations Standing for Equality

The Portal (Black LGBT Community Center)
Baltimore, MD 21201
410-962-8838

National Black Justice Coalition
1725 I St., N.W., Suite 300
Washington, DC
202-349-3755
www.nbjcoalition.org

ServiceMembers Legal Defense Network
PO Box 65301
Washington DC 20035-5301
202-328-3244
www.Servicememberslegaldefensenetwork.org

Unity Fellowship Church
5148 W. Jefferson Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90016
323-938-8322
866-227-4512
www.ufc-usa.org

Marylanders of Color Collective
8121 Georgia Ave., Suite 501
Silver Spring, MD 20190
301-587-7500
www.EqualityMaryland.org/MOCC

Us Helping Us
3636 Georgia Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20010
202-446-1100
www.UsHelpingUs.com

Immigration Equality, Inc.
350 W. 31st St., Suite 505
New York, NY 10001
www.immigrationequality.org

The Balm in Gilead, Inc.
130 W. 42nd St., Suite 450
New York, NY 10036
212-730-7381
www.BalminGilead.org

Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays
PFLAG Families of Color Network
1726 M St. N.W., Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036
202-467-8180
www.pflag.org

Unity Fellowship Church of Baltimore
114 W. Read St.
Baltimore, MD 21201
410-244-0884
www.ufcb.org

The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Community Center of Baltimore and Central Maryland
241 W. Chase St.
Baltimore, MD 21201
410-837-5445
www.glccb.org

Baltimore Black Gay Pride
714 Park Ave.
Baltimore, MD 21201
443-691-9669
www.bmoreblackpride.org

Websites

Chronology of Dr. Martin Luther King African American Liberation Struggle (www.stanford.edu/group/King/about_king/king-struggle/1896-1943.htm)

On Black single parenthood: www.blackstripe.com/archives/articles

Books and Publications

Sexuality and The Black Church: A Womanist Perspective by Kelly Brown Douglas, Orbis Books, 1999.

A Whosoever Church: Welcoming Gays and Lesbians into African American Congregations by Gary David Comstock, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Black Gay Man: Essays by Robert F. Reid-Pharr and Samuel Delany, New York University Press, 2001.

Coming Out While Staying In: Struggles and Celebrations of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals in the Church by Leanne McCall Tigert, United Church Press, 1996.

Does Your Momma Know: An Anthology of Black Lesbian Coming Out Stories edited by Lisa C. Moore, RedBone Press, 1998.

The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart by Peter J. Gomes, William Morrow and Co., 1996.

The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities by Delroy Constantine Simms, Alyson Publications, 2001.

Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde, Crossing Press, 1984.

Films

All God's Children. Dee Mosbacher, Frances Reid and Sylvia Rhue, 1996.

A Litany for Survival: The Life of Audre Lorde. Michelle Parkerson, 1995.

Tongues Untied. Marlon Riggs, 1989.

Living With Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100. Yvonne Welbon, 1999.

James Baldwin: The Price of a Ticket. Karen Thorson, 1990.

Our House: Lesbians and Gays in the Hood. Not Channel Zero, 1993.

Black Nations/Queer Nations? Shari Frilot, 1995.

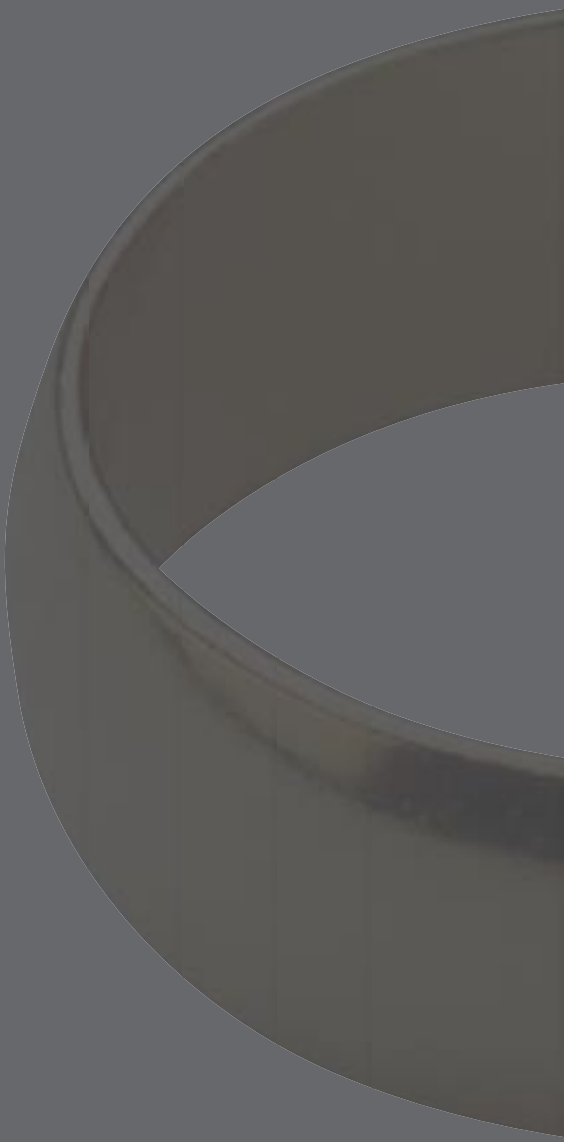
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