



**SPECIAL PRESENTATION**

**“SELMA AND STONEWALL: SETTING THE AGENDA FOR  
EQUAL RIGHTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY”**

**INTRODUCTION BY:**

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AND COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT,  
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**MODERATED BY:**

**JONATHAN CAPEHART, EDITORIAL WRITER,  
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**FEATURED PANELISTS:**

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DIRECTOR, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF  
COLORED PEOPLE**

**CORNELL BELCHER, POLLSTER, BRILLIANT CORNERS**

**DR. MICHAEL ERIC DYSON, AUTHOR, RADIO HOST, AND PROFESSOR OF  
SOCIOLOGY, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY**

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POLICY NETWORK AND RESEARCH ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, ROBERT F.  
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**RASHAD ROBINSON, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF MEDIA PROGRAMS, GAY &  
LESBIAN ALLIANCE AGAINST DEFAMATION (GLAAD)**

**9:00 AM – 10:30 AM  
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MR. JEFF KREHELY: Good morning and welcome to the Center for American Progress. My name is Jeff Krehely and I direct CAP's LGBT Research and Communications Project. And on behalf of the Arcus Foundation, welcome to our panel discussion today, "Selma and Stonewall: Setting the Agenda for Equal Rights in the 21st Century."

I'd like to extend special thanks to the Raben Group for their work pulling this event together as well as our panelists and our moderator today for their work and time. I'd like to especially thank the Arcus Foundation for its commitment to this issue today and its work on LGBT equality and social and racial justice as well.

When Arcus approached CAP about co-hosting this event, I was really thrilled. The overlap between issues relating to LGBT equality and racial justice are very important to many of us here at CAP. And it's for a wide range of reasons. And my program and the team that leads CAP's Progress 2050 program have been thinking through a research and policy agenda on this very topic and how we can start working with ally organizations and really kind of jumpstart progress in this issue space.

As you might know, 2050 is the year that we predict that the majority of our country's population will be racial and ethnic minorities. So CAP and the Progress 2050 program, we seek to build a progressive agenda that is more inclusive and reflects our country's rich racial and ethnic diversity.

So today is just the beginning I think of a serious, deep and long-term work on these issues here at CAP. I hope that our speakers and many of their friends, experts and colleagues in the room today will be part of this work going forward.

Now, to get the event officially started, I'm very happy to introduce Fred Davie, who is currently senior director of Social Justice and LGBT programs at the Arcus Foundation. Fred has extensive experience in social policy development and evaluation, philanthropy, government and management.

Prior to joining Arcus, Fred served as president and chief officer of Public/Private Ventures, a national action-based research and evaluation institute. He served as program officer for faith-based community development at the Ford Foundation and held several senior positions within the New York City government.

In February, 2009, Fred was named by President Obama to the Advisory Council of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Fred holds degrees from Yale University and Greensborough College in North Carolina where he was elected the first African-American president of the Student Government Association.

Fred will now introduce our panelists and our moderator and then we'll be underway. Again, welcome to you all and I'm looking forward to a great discussion here today and going forward. Thank you.

Fred?

MR. FRED DAVIE: Many thanks to Jeff Krehely and Winnie Stachelberg and John Podesta here at the Center for American Progress for joining with the Arcus Foundation to sponsor this morning's event. I'd also like to thank our friends at the Raben Group who have worked closely with the staff at the Arcus Foundation to put this event together.

I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues from the Arcus Foundation also who are here – Gloria Royal who's our director of communications, Johnny Jenkins who runs our Michigan program and Roz Lee who runs our Racial Justice, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity program. And I'll have more to say about her in a few minutes.

Just a short word on the Arcus Foundation. As most of you know, Arcus was founded 10 years ago by Jon Stryker with the purpose of promoting conservation and social justice – conservation in the area of conserving the habitat of great apes around the world and social justice primarily focused on LGBT issues, sexual orientation and gender identity.

Arcus does its work in five different portfolios. We have an international portfolio, a national portfolio, a Michigan portfolio, a religion and values portfolio, and then finally a racial justice, sexual orientation and gender identity portfolio.

That work is managed by Roz Lee and it is in that portfolio, that body of work that this program and others like it that we hope to do around the country and over the years, it's where this work sits. And it does so because Arcus firmly believes in promoting and understanding the intersection of racial justice, sexual orientation and gender identity, where there is commonality and where the issues diverge.

And it is our desire this morning and in future convenings (sp) to get at some of those issues but more significantly to find that common territory, that common ground, to find that intersection where we're united and in a coordinated way can advance an equal rights agenda for the country. So we're very pleased this morning to be able to host – to be able to sponsor this event hosted by our friends. And it is my pleasure to welcome you.

I have another task this morning and that is to introduce our moderator. I think most of you know him – Jonathan Capehart. Jonathan is an editorial writer for the Post and I assume that's the Washington Post and not the New York Post as a New Yorker. Jonathan specializes in national politics and environmental issues. Jonathan joined the editorial board in 2007. Prior to the Post he was a member of the New York City Daily News editorial board from 1993 to 2000.

He then became national affairs columnist for Bloomberg News from 2000 to 2001 and left to work as a policy adviser to Michael Bloomberg in his successful campaign to be mayor of New York City. Jonathan returned to the Daily News as deputy editorial of the editorial page from 2002 to 2005. He and the Daily News editorial board won the 99th Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing for the editorial series on the Apollo Theater in Harlem.

It is my pleasure to introduce our moderator this morning, Mr. Capehart.

(Applause.)

MR. JONATHAN CAPEHART: Thank you. Thank you, Fred. Thank you, Jeff, for the invitation to moderate this panel, the Arcus Foundation – excuse me – the Raben Group and also the Center for American Progress. We are behind schedule so we're going to toss out the little ticktock we have here and jump right on into the discussion. Let me introduce the panel first.

Next to me is Rashad Robinson from GLAAD. Excuse me. Please excuse me. I don't know where this is coming from. Hillary O. Shelton from the NAACP, the Washington bureau director. Next to him is C. Nicole Mason – it says Ph.D., executive director, Women of Color Policy Network and research assistant, Professor Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, NYU. And next to her is – I'm sure you all know who this is – Professor Dyson at Georgetown, radio host – I just did your radio show. Anything else you've got under your sleeve? That's enough. That's enough. Okay.

So what I'd like to do is to pose a question to each of you. And because we're running behind schedule, I would ask that you keep your answers brief so that we can engage in a conversation and then also, but probably more importantly, open it up to questions from the audience because you see there's a big audience here and I'm sure they have lots of questions.

So I want to start with Rashad. And can you just talk about, since the last Arcus report, how have things changed with regard to African-Americans, the African-American community and the LGBT community?

MR. RASHAD ROBINSON: Well, first of all thank you to the Arcus Foundation and the Center for American Progress and to everyone for coming out for this important conversation. I think that that in kind of thinking about what has changed or where we're heading, probably more appropriately, is that we're having more conversations. I think that the Arcus report was incredibly important as a conversation starter and really kind of opening up a dialogue around what are the conversations that we need to have and how do we need to have the conversations.

And for many years in the movement we've had conversations around how to talk to African-Americans, around LGBT issue without any data. We were kind of shooting

from the hip. We were making civil rights comparisons that were not helpful and did not kind of build the type of common ground or illustrate the type of concrete harms that LGBT people face in their everyday lives.

We were also having conversations about who LGBT people were or who gay Americans were and often times those folks were not people that looked like the folks that we were talking to. And so we were having conversations with African-Americans with visible images of people who weren't African-Americans.

And so it would be very easy to kind of dismiss this as gay people don't exist in my community or gay people are outside of my community. And we know that that is simply not true.

And so I think what is changing, and it's the work of GLAAD, it's the work of the NAACP and their new LGBT initiative and many other folks in this room is really pushing to have greater conversations and utilizing and leveraging this information to kind of move us forward.

MR. CAPEHART: Well, talking about the information from this report, let me introduce Cornell Belcher who's the pollster, Brilliant Colors is the name of your –

MR. CORNELL BELCHER: Brilliant Corners.

MR. CAPEHART: Brilliant Corners – well, you know. There's so much I can – but I'm sorry, Cornell.

MR. BELCHER: But Brilliant Colors is nice too. (Laughter.)

MR. CAPEHART: I'm a wordsmith. That's what I do. So talk more concretely and specifically about the results from the poll that you did.

MR. BELCHER: Well, one of the things – we pay a lot of attention on the divisions between this community and the African-American community. And the truth of the matter is we have a lot more in common than we have not. We have probably one or two issues where we're now on the same page but when you look at the broad expansive issues out here that face both communities, we have lot more in common than not.

When you're talking about issues of discrimination, inequality in the African-American community, of course there is such a historical consciousness to that issue for African-Americans so we're very sort of hypersensitive to that. I picked that up immediately over the last couple of years from the folks who surround us but also comes through in the data.

When you connect the issues of discrimination or inequality where anywhere – where there's people that are being sort of discriminated against or there's this idea that

they're being treated unfairly, you know, African-Americans, the conscience of African-Americans is to go there even before the white audiences and in stronger numbers.

And what I was amazed by and I've seen this now both in our national numbers, but also we did the beltway poll, is that African-Americans in the beltway see gays and lesbians being discriminated on just as much as African-Americans which is an amazing number to me because I always think I'm discriminated on. No one is discriminated on as much as I am because I get pulled over all the time. (Laughter.) But – where 46 percent of African-Americans think they're discriminated against a lot, 44 percent of African-Americans think that gays and lesbians are discriminated on a lot. So there is this joint sort of common (fold ?) of discrimination that surrounds both of us.

So that's the first hurdle, understanding that African-Americans actually see this community as one being discriminated on is important and they see that sort of that commonality in discrimination. And what resonates here is this idea of these ideals of equality and we've got to fight discrimination everywhere it is. And even when you sort of fold in language about gays and lesbians fighting for their equality and fighting for their fair rights, African-Americans strongly – I mean, that is broadly but also strongly move to that corner.

My conversation is actually – it's funny because I had a conversation I was having with some of the other folks earlier yesterday was – when I look into the data, it was reminiscent of the conversation I actually had with Howard Dean some years ago about, we're not partisan, but I'm a partisan. I look at everything as political. But it's the same sort of thing – you know, we've got to broaden the conversation.

If our foes define the conversation around one or two issues that they know they can wedge us around, they're going to win the conversation every time. But if we broaden this conversation about equality and about fighting discrimination, you know, on a broader spectrum – and again, and this is what our foes always do and our foes do it very well is they go to the value. We get caught talking about the specific and the details and try to make a lot of sense of the issue and our foes go directly to the visceral value.

And there are more visceral value sort of elements to our conversation that we can have that we're not having that sort of broaden the conversation away from the one or two issues that wedges. I mean, I'm not going to be eschewed – there are a couple of issues that wedges. Everyone on this panel, everyone in this room knows that, but broaden that conversation.

MR. CAPEHART: Well, talk about – I mean, sure, maybe everyone knows what those two issues are –

MR. BELCHER: Marriage equality.

MR. CAPEHART: Talk about them. Talk about them. Marriage equality and –

MR. BELCHER: Marriage equality – I mean, I'll not surprise anyone in this room – that's been a wedge issue, has been a tough hurdle here for African-Americans. I mean, the majority of African-Americans nationally break the opposite way of this and in the District of Columbia it's a poll – well, the beltway as opposed to sort of progressive group, one of the highest concentration of sort of educated, better educated upwardly mobile blacks in the country, you still have a majority who break against marriage equality.

But the interesting thing is when you get – and connect the dots – the interesting thing is that when you're getting both the qualitative and the quantitative data, this is the sort of the nuance of connecting the dots because the African-Americans are against discrimination everywhere but they don't see this issue as discrimination. And I know that's startling but follow me for a second.

It is also – first I thought of saying – also, you've got rather a large majority of African-Americans in the beltway who also think that that is a choice, that you've made a choice to be gay or lesbian. So in fact, you can get married but you choose not to because you make this choice so it's not discrimination. So one of the things that's really important here is this ideal that – exactly.

But understanding from what the work that as a campaign or a progressive organization, progressive have to do is is that part of this is education, it's that the first tier of any campaign to sort of move the needle in this community has to start with that conversation because as long as this is a choice, you're choosing to be that way so you're not being discriminated on because you know what, you can choose not to be that way and get married.

So it's not seen through the spectrum of discrimination. And my educated guess is if you change how they see it and if they start seeing it as discrimination, just like in every other aspect of life, African-Americans turn against it.

MR. CAPEHART: Let me bring in Mr. Shelton into this conversation because if you're going to educate the larger African-American community on LGBT issues, you need willing partners and the NAACP has been a willing partner in this effort.

So can you talk about the work the NAACP is doing and why it's important – why did the NAACP felt it is important to get in this given what Cornell just said. It must not be easy.

MR. HILARY SHELTON: Two things first. I want to thank my friends at the Center for American Progress for putting this forum together as well and the Arcus Foundation for the conversation.

But I would begin by saying we're not just entering this fight. If you go back and look at our public policy agenda, this one – this included anti-discrimination issues including those expanded to gay and lesbians, the GLBT community overall.

A good example of that is we've always supported, for instance, hate crimes or opposition to hate crimes and including gays, lesbians and others into the coverage for hate crimes protection. Again, it goes back to I think the analysis that you've given that was saying that if anybody is targeted with hatred and violence then indeed we need to make sure that we stop that from happening. So we've always stood next to our friends in the gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual community on those issues.

Employment discrimination – we were an original sponsoring organization of ENDA, the Employment Nondiscrimination Act. Again, basic civil rights protections for all including for those how happen to be gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual and on from there, issues of housing discrimination.

So in many ways, it goes back to actions against people in a discriminatory manner and that is consistent with what you were saying. We've always opposed those (issues ?) no matter who and what you might very well be. So the issue of that – it is education. And even as we enter the fray, quite frankly, on the issue of marriage and equality the issue then is is how that is discussed, quite frankly. Well, we discuss that as a moral tenet.

MR. CAPEHART: I'm sorry. I think your hair might be rubbing on the mike. (Laughter.) Your hair is wavy but it's not that wavy. (Laughter.) Go on. I'm sorry.

MR. SHELTON: Even healthcare discrimination – again, we know that there's been discrimination against the African-American community on the issues of healthcare, of access and the kind of options that are available under the healthcare menu and we worked very hard even as we passed this conference of the healthcare bill to make sure it covered everyone. There should be no excuses.

And then issues of law enforcement. We know the African-Americans are targeted more often, racial profiling and driving while black is an issue that comes up in our community. But we know that people that are perceived to be gay and lesbians are often times also targeted by law enforcement so you'll see a very strong support there, again, some that we can very well see as being part of who we are.

Let me get back to marriage equality for just a second. When we discuss marriage equality as that series of contracts, rights, privileges, powers of attorney, the right to adopt, we speak about them in those legal terms, there's a very, very strong support for all of those issues until you sum it up as marriage.

And I say this because marriage – and we've got a preacher in the room so I'm going to be careful of how I talk about this part – but when we're talking about marriage in those terms, most people don't interpret it as that legal process. They interpret it as a God given covenant. So it is something that is more tied to our moral perspective, their spiritual beliefs of what that tenet variable is and then you look to – and those of us who primarily are Christian – and then we point to some really problematic Scriptures in the Bible and whatnot to say that, well, you should be protecting – (inaudible) – than the other but we shouldn't call it marriage.

And it is amazing because that seems to trouble a lot of very morally driven communities that are very religiously driven as well. When I testified before the Senate on this issue and raised all the legal tenets of marriage and said, of course we should support the protections for anyone of any gender to be able to enter these contracts, everyone said, yes. And even the most Right Wing person opposed to same-sex marriages said, we don't disagree with you on that. And she had to stop herself by – I thought she was going to go on and say, just don't call it marriage.

So it's an amazing thing when we talk about it in those terms but again, it's about message. How do we break it down and begin talking about the tenets that make up this issue?

MR. CAPEHART: I want to bring in the preacher on the end, but I want to bring in Nicole Mason since you – I mean, your research is in the connection between race and class and gender and sexuality, so I'm curious about your view of all of this.

MS. NICOLE MASON: Well, first of all, we have to understand that blacks and black LGBT share common policy priorities. We care about education. We care about the economy. We care about healthcare. So we know that these things overlap.

And so, when we talk about LGBT issues, I think what we need to start thinking about is an intersectional framework and understanding of these issues and understand both within the racial justice framework and an LGBT framework the impact of race, class, gender, sexuality and gender identity on rights and privileges in our society.

And when we think about policy priorities and we think about where we place our efforts, I think what trips us up with marriage equality is when we don't overlap.

So, for example, when we talk about blacks mobilizing around marriage equality, that's not a policy priority. That's not high on our agenda in the way that it may be on other agendas or the mainstream LGBT agenda.

But I think there's not a common understanding about, again, where we meet and come together and organize around issues of hate crimes, anti-discrimination legislation and where we take a pass or where we don't converge. And I think that when we talk about how we move the discussion and how we think about this, we have to understand and think about who is the "we" we're talking about in terms of building community and alliances. When we expand our definition of who the "we" is and who gets included, the agenda looks a bit different. The issues that we take on change. We understand how we allocate our resources to different fights and struggles for equality and antidiscrimination. And I think that we haven't gotten there. We need to get there in terms of thinking about how we move the conversation forward.

MR. CAPEHART: Thanks, Nicole.

So now Professor Preacher Dyson, you – from that mistake – and you’ve gone through your own journey when it comes to LGBT issues. And being a person of faith and a preacher, how can you – or how would it be possible to help bring along African-Americans who just can’t get to where you are right now?

MR. MICHAEL ERIC DYSON: Well, I think that – well, first of all, I’m grateful to be here with such a distinguished moderator and all these brilliant panelists and so Arcus and CAP. I’m appreciative of that.

Yes. I think that is an important point as Mr. Shelton spoke about that people who have religious beliefs, religiously driven moral conceptions certainly have problems with what their Scriptures tell them is just or right or true. So you’ve got to start where people are. It’s like Jesus with the woman at the well. You can’t have no big theological discussion about transformation. You’ve got to say, give me a drink of water. Then when you get the drink of water, then you can have the discussion. And even that is a problematic engagement given what he told her about her five husbands and so on.

But the thing is that I think – what I’ve tried to do is to tell people about my own understanding of gay and lesbian and transgender and bisexual people and those issues and try to confront them early on. Now, I made the faux pas, I suppose, Brother Belcher’s Brilliant Corners, colors and conceptions. (Laughter.) So I think that when black people say, well, it’s not a civil rights, they get possessive. And I understand that. You know, we ain’t got much. Can we hold on to the civil rights discourse? You all going to pimp that too? Damn. (Laughter.) Yes. It’s copyrighted.

Because I tell you what – I was writing a commentary for a Jewish magazine and I said something about black people and the holocaust and they gently pulled me aside, look, man, that’s us. We know it’s a horrible situation in the ghetto, the shtetl, but the holocaust thing is usually – we reserve that for our particular experience and engagement as a unique historical moment in the development of the 20th century’s struggles with evil. All right. I get that. And there still could be an African holocaust – people talk about it – but I understand the point.

So with African-American people religiously informed conceptions of moral identity were rooted in the churches for the civil rights movement too. That’s the tricky thing, right? So that a lot of people who think about their religion and their faith in regard to their social struggle see that civil rights movement as a God ordained sanction thing. That’s why when the Supreme Court deliberated somebody said God almighty has spoken from Washington, D.C.

Now, having said that, I try to push black people from within. I say, well, really we ain’t ultimately – you say, how dare gay and lesbian people rip off our language? I said, so King got that from Gandhi. Is he paying royalties to the Indian community? I mean, think about it. When Gandhi was up against the British folk, Satyagraha and ahimsa, those terms that are talking about soul force and non-violent interaction were not originating in African-American communities. So already we’ve had conceptual

promiscuity. This stuff goes everywhere. We just borrow them from everybody. We're improvising.

So I say to African-American people, I get the point. You know, you say, look, gay and lesbian people, they can fake like they're straight – I can't fake like I'm black or white. I'm not light enough skinned to pretend that I am a white person. Some African-American people can pass so there's a kind of sexual passing that goes on until you acknowledge in some cases that you're gay.

So I'll say it by saying this: I think that one of the things we have to do with religious people is say, look, the central tenet of your faith is tolerance and love because Jesus said it comes down to – for my faith – love the Lord, I gathered all that hard (money ?) so love thy neighbor as thyself. It ain't no asterisks except for the gay people, except for the lesbians, the transgender and bisexuals, except for the poor, except for the – and then add on.

So I say, first of all, the core of the faith is about promoting an ethic of love. If that's the case, nobody is immune from the virus of love. That has to be central.

Secondly, with the religious Scriptures, you know, as Brother Shelton said, that's a complicated hermeneutical engagement, an interpretive battle. But what you're got to say to people is that a lot of that stuff was about strangers versus foreigners, versus people who are part of a community versus sexuality. And I said, and if you get it down to the sexuality part, there's a lot of stuff in the Bible you ain't doing, handling snakes, drinking poison, and a bunch of other stuff. If you're going to be literal about it, be literal about.

But thirdly, black people can't really afford to be biblical literalists because we couldn't read the Bible about which we're literal 150 years ago. You can't be literal about something of which you have no literary access. So then – yes. So 150 years ago, if you were outlawed from reading the Bible, then the biblical literalism to which you now stringently adhere has to at least be challenged. That's a more arcane point but you get it in there.

And then, finally – and by saying this that I think that ultimately, as the brilliant research here has shown, when you phrase it a certain way that it's a discrimination, as Brother Shelton was talking about, Brother Belcher, were speaking about, when you think about that, then black people say, yes. That ain't right. That ain't right. That ain't right. Now, when we get down to the marriage question, you know, as Dr. Julianne Malveaux said, you know, if you're against gay marriage, don't marry no gay people. (Laughter.) Ultimately, you know. That's your thing. That's your privilege. That's your right.

But more seriously, I think that – and I say, hey, I'm trying to encourage every gay and lesbian, transgender, bisexual person to get married. We need some numbers in the black community. It's looking rough for us right now. So we need some marriage numbers. We're trying to encourage dogs, cats, birds to get together.

But on a serious vane, I say to black people, ain't that interesting. Here we are being bombarded morally about the subversion ethically of our community – we ain't getting married, we're having children out of wedlock – and we are against people of a different sexual orientation who even according to the people who are offending the moral norm of not being married adhere to it. They believe it. Black people are curious in that sense.

So now here are gay and lesbians, transgender, bisexual people and others who want to get married and we stand against them because of a sexual orientation issue whereas morally we think more people who are straight should be married.

So then we begin to challenge some of the bigotry, and Howard Thurman, the great black preacher, said a bigot is a person who makes an idol of his commitments. So we don't want to warship at the altar, genuflect at the altar of our commitments. Be a bit more humble. And then when that love ethic kicks in, I think we begin to make progress.

So I think we've got a challenge from within and then we've got to say gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual people, own up to your racism, own up to the way in which you haven't been historically sensitive to the ways in which you're privileged. I mean, one of the stereotypes about being gay is being smart. Damn, we wish we could get that one. They are hypersensitive. They are esthetically artistic. There are a lot of stereotypes about gay people, some of which are good. We would like to get in on some of that. (Laughter.)

So I think that you've got to understand the historical ways in which white men who have been gay have also been racist, conservative, reactionary, except when it comes to their own particular sexual orientation. So, you know, black people checking that out. James Baldwin said black people had a problem with some Jewish brothers and sisters, not because they were Jewish but because they were white, in terms of the great antipathy between evolving black and Jewish communities.

So I say the same thing with gay and lesbians is I think that we've got to be sensitive to the ways in which the historical forces of white supremacy and white privilege have operated in the context of gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual communities. Of course, that doesn't deal with the fact that many people who are gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender are also black, as Professor Mason brilliantly said.

So what do we do about the convergence of all those realities? We can't talk about our community versus theirs. It's us. If you're gay or lesbian, transgender or bisexual, you are us. James Baldwin, Bayard Rustin, Angela Davis, Barbara Smith and a whole – June Jordan and a whole range of people who have been deeply and profoundly engaged in serious activism. I hope I didn't – (I knew nobody then ?). (Laughter.) You know, have also been simultaneous black and lesbian and gay and transgender and bisexual and a whole bunch of other stuff as well. So that's what I would do.

MR. CAPEHART: Professor Dyson, you know, maybe – did you all know Angela Davis – I didn't know either. Rashad looked at me like, yes. I've got a list. I had no idea.

MR. DYSON: Wait a minute. I didn't out her, did I? I love Angela Davis. I'm saying I hope I didn't –

MR. BELCHER: Can I jump in?

MR. CAPEHART: Yes, please jump in. Because actually we are back on schedule and it's time to open it up for discussion. So go ahead and talk, Cornell. Go ahead.

MR. BELCHER: I had one point that sort of pivots off of – and by the way, I love being on panels with these people because I learn so much. I'm like taking notes. But interesting point that you talk about sort of – that you've got to understand the racial matters that go on because last year – or actually two years ago at a poll we asked African-Americans about groups that were working against the interests of their community. At the top of that list were the National Republican Party. But either second or third on the list was gay and lesbian organizations.

So there is some work we have to do here because – I mean, to pivot off this point, because – and you see them in focus groups, I mean, these gay rights organizations, gay and lesbian organizations – I know I'm going to get in trouble. People, don't beat me up. These organizations, they're not seen as black organizations or particularly diverse organizations. They're primarily seen as well-to-do white people, particularly well-to-do white men. So that's a real issue.

MR. SHELTON: Let me add a thought to that just before we – (off mike) – as well. The NAACP in California has strongly opposed Proposition Eight. We were on the frontline of it. Our state conference president Alice Huffman was all over it. And after the proposition passed, the same branch presidents that went out there and said, my organization says that we should oppose these discriminatory initiatives then we're opposed to them. But they were called the N word, screamed from across the street by what they interpreted as being white gay – in this case, it was white gay men. So it ended up quite frankly actually substantiating that particular point with that example.

So you're right. It's amazing that how somehow or another that the perception was even though the NAACP – and I guess you weren't attention to that part of it – but even though the NAACP opposed this initiative, the statistics came back saying that a lot of African-Americans supported it. Every African-American became the enemy, even those that openly supported it, or opposed it in this case.

MR. ROBINSON: You know, in many ways that's why I came to do gay rights work. I was working in the voting rights field until 2004. And I actually had a conversation with my aunt one time. I was home and I was out to my family but I didn't really talk to my great aunt about my relationships. And she was sitting around around

Thanksgiving and having this conversation and she kept looking at me – and she was my favorite aunt because she was always the best dressed and she had great style –

MR. CAPEHART (?): There goes that esthetic thing again.

MR. ROBINSON: Yes, it was. It's that esthetic thing, right? And she was also really direct so she can always, you know, kind of cut through the mess and she looked at me and she said, you know, she was like, what are you doing? She's like, you're so handsome and you're single. You don't have a lady friend. And she knew that I was gay.

How come you don't have a lady friend? I kept looking – I'm like, oh, because I'm gay. And she's like – you know, it was the first time I had said that to her and she's like, gay? You know, what does gay mean? And so she was wanting me to have a conversation that I don't have or that I wasn't having at that time.

She was like what does gay mean? I'm like, Aunt Dot, you have a gay daughter. You have a lesbian daughter. You know what gay is. And she said, well, what does it mean? I said, you know, it means that I – you know, I date men. She said, well, do you have a man friend? And I said, no. She said, but what good is being gay then? (Laughter.)

And I say that because it illustrates the fact that conversations are not happening. So we can have this conversation around white men yelling racist things across the street to a group of black activist leaders or we can have a conversation around the racism within the LGBT community or the homophobia within the black community.

And what it leaves out is me. It leaves out the thousands, hundreds of thousands of black LGBT people living in their communities every day facing concrete harms, able to be fired from their job in 28 states simply because of who they are. And it leaves them out of the dialogue and it makes it seem like this is – these folks are not rich. These folks don't have access to the kind of gay dollar that we hear about in the media. They're not being marketed to by major corporations. They are everyday black folks that are going sometimes to their churches and being told that they're (dishonored ?) and they're deformed. They are being denied full participation in the life of their community, having to hide their relationships.

And so at the root of all of these conversations is how do we build the type of common ground within our community that elevates the conversation so that we're talking about why black LGBT people should be able to have full participation in the life of their community and not anyone else because this really at the end of the day is about why our children, our aunts and uncles, our grandchildren should be able to be able to participate.

MR. CAPEHART: Well, Rashad, how do you elevate a conversation that you just acknowledged isn't even being had? How do we, as African-Americans, go about creating the atmosphere, creating the environment where it's possible for a Rashad in a

small town, say in Kansas or Indiana, come out to his or her aunt or uncle or family members and not be kicked out of the home or excommunicated or any of the other horrible things that happen everyday?

MR. ROBINSON: I mean, I don't think there's an easy answer to that. I think it is about a series of conversations, about the conversations of the straight folks in this room standing up when they hear homophobic things in their family and having conversations and no feeling like to stand up for LGBT issues is standing up for someone outside of their community. It's about encouraging people who are in your life who may be in the closet that come out and start having the conversations. It's about opening those doors.

It's about me as a – at the time, a 22-year-old who was out and living a great life in Washington, D.C., and at home and not wanting to have a conversation with my great aunt who knew gay people and had a gay daughter but feeling like I was going to kind of work around that conversation. And it's about all the conversations that we work around everyday.

So also I want to call out my friend Sharon Lettman who's the executive director of the National Black Justice Coalition back there. And Sharon is doing – and the National Black Justice Coalition is doing a lot of work to build alliances between communities. And I think that the work of organizations like that is also vital for us to be able to change the dialogue between gay being a white construct and being black is something that can't be gay.

MR. CAPEHART: Where is she because I saw people looking?

MR. DYSON: I think also you've got to argue from analogy. I think that – and it goes over like a brick cloud. You've got to acknowledge that. It's going to be tough to begin with.

But you know, when I got to a lot – I preach in a lot of churches and to black organizations. And one of the things I say is look, you know, gay and lesbian and bisexual and transgender people – and we know all these big theories about the social construction of sexual orientation and so on and so forth. And I say, they can no more be straight with what you mean by that tomorrow morning than you can get up tomorrow morning and be gay or lesbian or bisexual or transgender.

Now, we know that there's a sliding scale. There's a continuum. I don't get into those kind of complex arguments because that might challenge them really because – oh, I could really be gay and just don't know. (Laughter.) The kind of – (inaudible) – argument. So it would be rough. Or the Woody Allen argument, you know, it increases by 50 percent your chance of having a date on Saturday night, except in your case, I'd say it didn't do you any good. (Laughter.) So the thing is – which is classic. That's brilliant, right?

But the thing is that if you say to people, you know, look, stop saying that it's not – you know, I'm black and I have no choice, which clearly is a real thing. I saw in some of the Belcher report, if we can call it that, that black people were saying, look, when I walk into a room, even if you're black and gay, the first thing they see is your blackness, not your being gay. That's a legitimate point. It doesn't also, however mean that being gay is not a traumatizing experience.

So you argue from analogy just like it means that some of us who are black people trying to avoid being black, don't want to really talk about it, are tired of carrying the burden, you begin to analogize from black experience to gay and lesbian experience and own up to the intersections as opposed to being defensive about them because I think a lot of black people think, look, if this term gets jacked, then we don't have anything left and then privileged people – and again, the point is that there are so many people who are not privileged and they're not privileged in our churches where we exploit gay labor but don't acknowledge gay genius.

Because I said I ain't never been – and I tell black people, I ain't never been in a black church that says we don't take any gay money. Ain't never seen it. I ain't never been into one. The most homophobic church in the world taking gay tax. So I said, the only funny money they don't want is change.

So what's interesting to me is that if you begin to – and then you begin to add some self-criticism, some humor and engage through analogy what it means to be gay or lesbian, a transgender or bisexual and it's not some reality outside but it's within our communities and the people you have loved have often been gay or lesbian or bisexual, transgender.

And when you say you don't get retroactively homophobic, had I know my great cousin who gave me money for college was gay, I wouldn't have taken it, right, you begin to then say, well, wait. Maybe I need to challenge some of my beliefs about what it means to be gay or lesbian or bisexual or transgender. I think when we can do that, then we can have open and honest conversations and we can tell the truth because truth telling is a rare commodity in America.

MR. CAPEHART: Nicole, any reaction to all this?

MS. MASON: First I want to say I was – some years ago I worked very closely with Alice in California in MBGC (ph) to sort of think about how blacks might do mobilization around Prop Eight. And we had some ideas about who we should target, what we should be working on. I mean, we flew to California and dedicated our own resources to try to figure this out.

So it was really disheartening when after the decision came down or when the vote came down that we were sort of abandoned and there was no one to stand with us to say, hey, actually we were here, they were here. And then also when we – another really great point is when we said, given what we know, we know that you don't need to focus on the black church. You need to focus on people who are movable. We need to focus

on single black women. We need to focus on populations who are not so much tied to – it's not about religion and morals and values. That message fell on deaf ears. But when it came down, the blame was placed on our shoulders. So I think that's –

MR. SHELTON: Just to raise something. One of the challenges, at least in my opinion again, was that we didn't focus in on the tangible rights issues rather than – again, when you use a term like marriage in our communities, it's not just those legal protections. When you use a term like marriage in our communities, it does speak back to our religious perspectives and the values that come out of those perspectives on issues of relationships between two people and a marriage in that construct.

But when we talk about it as – if we made the argument that what this bill is going to do is going to create problems with two people of the same gender being able to enter into a contract and would say would care for each other and be responsible for each other, would allow two people to enter a covenant or agreement or a contract that will allow – if I'm incapacitated, then my friend that I've designated can very well make decisions for whether or not I should get that surgery or not. When we speak about in those terms of about – if something happens to me, then he will take care of my children, when we talk about it in those terms of what marriage is and break down every component, you don't get any opposition. So the issue then is as we're talking about is selling that.

One of the ways that we've also been able to talk about it is we recognize that this is a political wedge. It's the same wedge that the anti-affirmative action initiative was to bring Right Wing extremists out of the hills and down to the polls. In many ways, we used it to – it was used the same way against us, quite frankly. When we frame it that way for our folks, they start looking at it very differently. It's another one of those ploys.

And then the ultimate question gets asked, that is when the discrimination happens against me, when somebody decides to burn my church because they're registering too many voters, when someone decides to attack my community because they decide that they don't like black folks anymore, when some folks decide to do all these things that are very historically and traditionally clearly racist and we tie that to everything else, the support comes out loudly and strongly. But when it looks like they're trying to be this – how shall I put it – this intervention into our community – let me put it this way.

The question was asked to me a long time ago, how can you not support gay marriage if you're supporting the position in *Loving vs. Virginia*? Well, the answer is we didn't endorse a racial and ethnic minority diversity in marriage. We opposed discrimination of those who are different being able to enjoy those same rights and privileges. When you take that position, the support grows much more strongly.

And I hate to be – I'm going to be a little provocative here but I'll just say because it's true. What we kept seeing our strategies that were not coming from our communities that truly understood our communities. And indeed, they were strategies that were coming from someplace else trying to suggest how to – as a matter of fact, it reminded me of a black exploitation movie, you know, where you take an assessment of

what you're seeing in front of you but you filter through some stereotypes and other problems and whatnot and then end up with the result of not even listen to those people you're trying to convince.

MR. CAPEHART: And yet, that gets to my final question before I open it up to the audience because I want to give folks enough time to ask all the questions they want. But I was disturbed by something – (inaudible) – something that you said that there was MBGC and NAACP and all sorts of other organizations working on behalf of gay organizations or trying to help and partner with gay organizations to defeat Prop Eight. And then, when it passed, all that work, all that support was completely ignored.

So I'm just wondering do you feel as though you were taken advantage of, you were taken for granted? And if so, how does that impact any other work you might do with gay organizations down the road?

MS. MASON: Well, when I was thinking my time in this conversation, one of the things that kept coming up for me is this idea of trust. There needs to be trust between both the black LGBT community, white mainstream gay organizations and black civil rights organization. There's very low levels of trust. And when things like this happen, it just continues to erode the trust or whatever good will has been built from working with one another.

Did we feel – I don't know if we ever circled back around to have those conversations about what happened, where were you? And I think we need to ask those questions a bit more frequently and engage and say, hey, where were you when I was standing there? You know, there are very few articles written about, hey, blacks didn't lose Prop Eight. I mean, it was a collective effort. We all decided – I mean, you all decided on this strategy and sort of put it at our door and we either were going to get in or get out. And so you know, really, really taking apart what really happened.

MR. SHELTON: Can I add to that? In our vernacular I felt almost as if it was that whole adage of last hired and first fired. And that is we were the last ones brought to the table for a strategy that had already been developed. It was like almost that addendum – oh, yes, by the way. We'd better get them black folks involved in this conversation as well. And here's the strategy for you all to implement in your community.

Instead of saying from the very beginning, look, we hit every community that this issue affects everyone across regardless of your race, gender, ethnicity or your – wherever you're from – and then making sure that the strategy from the beginning was all inclusive. It's all too often – and it was so consistent as we looked at it that that addendum, that last minute thing, it happens often times when we're talking to our political friends about turning out the black vote, they go, oh, yes, when the money starts flowing down, the resources to get us out to the polls, it's like the last thing that happens. Oh, yes. Now we're going to free up the black money.

MR. CAPEHART: Rashad and then professor and then we'll open it up to questions.

MR. BELCHER: And then I have something for you.

MR. CAPEHART: Oh, really? Okay, Cornell.

MR. ROBINSON: I agree with you. I also think that we've also missed the point around the data as well because if every black person in California – because California does not have a huge black population. If every black person and voted no on Prop Eight, Prop Eight would have still passed.

And I think that's something that we often times miss in the statistics. And had Prop Eight failed and marriage equality had happened, there would have been beautiful marriage ceremonies happening in many parts of California and little black boys and little black girls who may not have conformed to the right gender identity or may have appeared to be gay would have still felt unsafe in their communities and would not have felt like they could be out in their communities.

And so it really misses the point around culture change, around how do we change the culture and have the conversations we need to have within the black community, because even if marriage equality had passed and we would have marriage equality in California, it was not a silver bullet to equality. It is not a silver bullet to having equal rights for gay and lesbian folks. And the work will still need to happen.

And who does the work after that? Who's responsible for the kids being born right now who are going to end up gay and are going to be sometimes bullied in schools, who are going to be denied full participation in the life of their community? And if they moved out of California and moved to a state or many of the states where most black people live in the south, they can be fired from their jobs in all those states simply for being gay, legally?

And so I think the conversation is beyond just kind of why kind of a polling perspective or an issue perspective the African-American community is not kind of fully there on marriage. It's also about "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and the pipeline that the military has been for African-Americans to move out of their communities, have access to college and opportunity and the same doorways don't exist for young black folks who want to use the military as an opportunity to get out of their community.

MR. CAPEHART: Professor Dyson and then Cornell real quickly so we can open it up to questions.

MR. DYSON: Well, just a couple of things. I think that if we want to look at the way in which identity is formed, all of us have multiple identities and we belong to multiple identity groups, right? And so that's a basic anthropological fact. So even if you're gay or lesbian or bisexual, transgender, you still are raced, you're still a gender.

And part of the problem is we don't account for the liabilities of those other identities. Even if you self-identify as a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender person, you still have to account for the fact that certain privileges you've got because of your race that other people don't have, because of your gender – gay men in terms of patriarchy versus lesbian women in terms of their being subjected to arbitrary women caprice of a sexist society. So I think we have to account for those liabilities of our other parts of our identity.

And then, secondly, if we want to get a sense of how this stuff works racially and breaks down, think of the feminist movement. You know, white women who were engaged in practices of resistance have also been engaged by Latina and first nations and African-American women saying, look, you know, our issues ain't all your issues.

And so, when you come in and say certain criticisms of patriarchy and so, we've got black men who are not even allowed to participate as fully-fledged members of their society in a patriarchal culture that tells men they ought to be responsible for their families. And if you are then have a job, you're not understanding the way in which the guy to whom you go home everyday is the person who's effectively, institutionally and collectively, oppressing the man with whom I am partnered in the heterosexual world.

And so, as a result of that, what ends up happening is that yes, as feminists, we understand our common ground in opposing patriarchy but we don't account for the ways in which race begins to divide up the spoils among men who are competing over limited resources.

Now, we want to deconstruct that. We want to challenge that and to say that men should have a different identity of themselves but that's easy to say when you've been in control and you're in charge and your manhood is not at stake in the same way.

So I – (inaudible) – that to say it would be helpful, I think, in making these arguments, as Brother Shelton said, and Professor Mason said that we take into account those communities to which we want to give the message which is what you're doing here today. And I think one of those things is to be sensitive to the issue.

Let me end by saying this. For instance – I'll give you another for instance and another – when the Michael Vic situation – I hesitate to bring this up but let me bring it up. A lot of black people is like – it's not that black people don't like dogs. We all have dogs. Rex, King, hey, how are you? But you know, black people were saying, white people be treating their dogs like they family members, leave money to them, you know, dowry. Are you crazy? All right.

Now, what he did was evil and wrong but damn, to go to jail for three or four years when you've got men in NFL beating women, killing them, murdering them, shooting in clubs, right? So a lot of black people said, well, damn, Michael Vic was wrong but they treat him like he was Hitler, right, in a very serious fashion.

And black people say, look, the reason why we have a little antipathy toward and not enough sensitivity for the animal rights movement is because Lassie didn't come to the civil rights movement, didn't come to the march of Washington, didn't show up – what's that, girl? You're against discrimination? (Laughter.) Lassie had a program on television when Nat King Cole couldn't stay on TV. Lassie and Rin Tin Tin had an ongoing 20-year relationship for television and a black man couldn't. So we ain't too deep and keen on the animal rights movement until we see that the animals are willing to join us. (Laughter.) So I think that we have to be sensitive to that.

MR. CAPEHART: Cornell. Say your piece.

MR. BELCHER: Real quick.

MR. DYSON (?): They should tell – (inaudible). (Laughter.)

MR. BELCHER: Real quickly and it sort of brings it back and this is – this is sort of where in practicality because it brings – (inaudible) – Brother Shelton here, I mean, it brings it all back, is we still have to take on historical ghost of discrimination for minorities in order to advance equality for gays and lesbians because the truth of the matter is when you look at these organizations, there are not enough people of diversity around them and far too often, you are coming in at the last minute and giving a strategy, and that's bullshit because it happens all the time. It happens in politics, it happens everywhere where you have this cadre of people who look exactly like, think exactly like and are calling all the shots. And then they can make all the decisions and they make all the decisions and they control the power and the economics of it and then we're brought in at the last minute.

And what I say to people even in politics, because I fight with the Democratic Party all the time. You know, if you've got a table – if you go at the table as someone who's trying to move an agenda or a vote, if you go into a meeting and everyone around that table looks exactly like, looks exactly like, thinks exactly like and probably from that exact sort of area, they're not working for you. They're working for themselves.

And the truth of the matter is there are a lot of people who got rich on that initiative out there in California. Win or lose, they won. And then we get blamed for it. The truth of the matter is I'm tired of that bullshit and quite frankly, I was even tired – when I was approached to do this, I knew Arcus and I respected them.

So that's the only reason why I did it because I've been disrespected by too many sort of gay and lesbian organizations across the board. Now, you know, it's one thing to be disrespected by the Democratic Party but it's another thing to be disrespected by all these other organizations.

So you've got to challenge this stuff inside of these organizations as well. I will never be a part of a campaign where I'm brought in at the last minute to sort of take care of this black stuff and then I'm told what the black stuff in fact is because you know

what, that's a losing proposition. And you know what, and if you engage in these tactics, you deserve to lose and you're going to lose.

MR. DYSON: But I'll say – but let me add one thing to that though. Let me add one caveat.

MR. CAPEHART: Fast, Professor Dyson. Fast.

MR. DYSON: But here's the way we get on top.

MR. CAPEHART: Fast.

MR. DYSON: Here's the way we get on top though, so to speak, is that – (laughter) – but black people challenge their own homophobia because if we were interested seriously in challenging the homophobia we ain't got to wait for white folk or anybody else come it. We would challenge it in our own communities.

The problem is we're bringing in people who already are predisposed. Gay and lesbian people are thinking, damn, we don't want to approach the black people at a certain level because we know, given the stereotypes about – or the conceptions that black people will be resistant, don't want equal marriage and so and so forth. So they have a reason to be skeptical even though they don't have a right to be discriminatory.

But at the same time, we have to challenge ourselves in our own communities to own up to what my Brother Rashad was saying. If we would own up to the ways in which we're discriminating against other people, we're bringing gay and lesbian people at the last minute in terms of our rights struggles within our own communities. In fact, they're not even being brought at the last minute. We're trying to keep them out. So can you imagine being gay or lesbian and bisexual, transgender and black and seeing that your argument which is so brilliant and saying – but you ain't realizing the – black people do the same thing to us as gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender people.

So I'm saying use that energy too to focus on how in our own communities we're doing the same thing. When you have a black person everybody knows is gay in the choir – I hate to be stereotypical there – in the choir and a preacher has preached a homophobic sermon and that gay person has to get up and then cosign the implicit bigotry, if not explicit expression of your homophobia, by singing a song, look at the sacrifice of dignity and the embrace of the larger project of black self-determination that he or she must do in his or her own body in order to accomplish that. We've got to be more sensitive to that as well so I think we've got to challenge ourselves from within as well. I just wanted to add that caveat.

MR. CAPEHART: Okay. (Laughter.) Time for questions. There's a question in the back. I don't know if there are microphones. Yes. Way in the back because her hand was up first. And just state your name and who you are and pithy questions please.

Q: Hi. My name is Bethany. I'm from California so I was around for the whole Prop Eight thing. And I wrote my honors thesis on the use of African-American civil rights rhetoric in LGBT politics. And I'm just wondering – you alluded to this a little bit but I'm just wondering what you think about the allusion to the black civil rights movement from organizations, from the media, from – you'll see signs of protest that say gay is the new black, welcome to Selma, I am a second class citizen, et cetera. And I was just wondering what you all think about that.

MR. CAPEHART: It's a great question. Short, pithy answers to a short pithy question.

MR. SHELTON: Pithy. It's a challenge to be pithy.

MR. DYSON: I'll be very brief.

MR. CAPEHART: What?

MR. DYSON: I'll be very brief. Yes. I understand why it's a problem to many African-American people but I encourage gay and lesbian people to use those terms but also to understand what Selma was, to understand the very terms to which they refer and then be conversant with those histories and then engage with black people who are themselves activists within those communities.

But I think it's legitimate. I think the black people have to be challenged on that. We don't have – the Belcher report showed that equal rights works better than civil rights so in terms of strategy it might be good to talk about equal rights but in terms of the absolutely ability to say it, I say, yes, challenge black people ourselves to think up about how we borrow terms from other people in order to come up with our movement as well.

MR. SHELTON: If I may add something very, very quickly, I promise.

MR. CAPEHART: Fast. And fast.

MR. SHELTON: You've got to develop your own language but then see where it connects. I think you're absolutely right, a (massive ?) understanding of other people's struggles is extremely important but you have to do in your own terms then help us understand what it's like. For instance, you can compare it to what is not the same thing. Once you get hung up on that, you can't get – once you get hung up on whether somebody's borrowing your language, your struggle, your challenges and concerns and whatnot, it ends up distracting from the rest of the conversation that needs to be had.

MR. CAPEHART: Rashad.

MR. ROBINSON: We produced this document – I think a lot of it's handed out – it actually leverages the brilliant Arcus research that was –

MR. CAPEHART: Wow. Bless you. (Laughter.)

MR. ROBINSON: But it really advocates and pushes for us to use equal rights and from a strategic perspective but also as progressives and as folks who really want to build common ground. It's also about remembering that if it's a progressive, Selma should be your Selma. And we don't need to make a new Selma. Selma is important because it was Selma. And we should be able to kind of honor and remember the fact that the civil rights movement and the movement for full racial equality is not over.

MR. CAPEHART: The woman in red, or pink.

Q: Good morning. I'm Elizabeth Epps (sp). The word "choice" has come a lot in your comments and also in the rhetoric at least in the three decades of my life. And I wonder particularly with those of us who have a goal for those in the African-American community, especially to become more accepting of all of our loved ones when it comes to marriage equality, et cetera.

With regard to the word "choice," is there room for those of us who would prefer to not focus on that as an issue to the extent that they're integral parts of our community that are choices, like religion that most people proudly claim as a choice but you don't have to dismissively say, I didn't choose to be Protestant or something. There's this connotation that makes it as if because something is a choice it's necessarily less worthy of validation or recognition.

And I wonder, is there room for us to be permissible of not necessarily taking issue with whether sexuality is a choice because I don't know but allowing that maybe it is and it's an okay choice and seeing if that might be an entry way to make it to the degree you see it as a choice it's an okay one. And I wonder if there's room for that in the discussion.

MR. CAPEHART: You can jump in. If anybody else has a question – has a response because I know you have a response. (Laughter.)

MR. DYSON (?): It's my choice.

MR. CAPEHART: Okay. Go ahead.

MR. DYSON: Well, yes, I think that's a brilliant point. And strategically that may be further down the line because you want to win recognition for the thing to begin with but why not get it simultaneously, why not getting in the door? You're negotiating for the package. You've got to get everything when you're negotiating at the beginning because later on they're going to treat you like a regular person, right, to make a contractual analogy.

You're right. Why is it that choice becomes somehow lower on the hierarchy of acceptability because I was born gay. Okay. God bless you. We can forgive you. But if you make a choice, we can't forgive you, right? See, that's the psychology of the purists

that if you're born that way, then we can't help it. But if you choose to do that, then it's a problem.

I think that's a brilliant point. I think that's the thing that needs to be dealt with, but I think that it has to be done in a way that recognizes that the frontline battle right now is even the possibility of the acknowledgement of marriage or homosexuality as a legitimate constituent of one's identity and to take that on politically but I think that your point is absolutely right. It's indefensible that we would say that it's a choice and therefore it's inferior, but strategically, I think one has to follow the other and I think that choice comes down further down the line but it's a brilliant point. And I would teach it at my class.

MR. CAPEHART: Anybody else want in or should I go to the next – okay.

Q: Good morning. My name is Alisa Hugley (ph). I wanted to thank all the panelists for a fruitful discussion this morning. Earlier this year, I was in a health class in a charter school in northeast D.C. and I found myself trying to facilitate a discussion with a young 15-year-old male who is out and gay and protect him from many classmates who wanted to educate themselves but their language, their gay bashing was so strong, I found myself flashback as the only black girl in an all white classroom answering all the questions, well, how come you're black on this side and not on the palm of your hands?

And I just wanted to remind and suggest as a possible solution, one of the good things that is coming out of I guess the gay movement is younger kids at the time when they're discovering their sexuality and developing their identity – I also had a bisexual girl in this class. I had a gay male in the class. These were all black students. But I had one guy who was like a Neanderthal just who continued to go at and go at and go at in such a negative way.

And I was trying to facilitate and protect – we don't use those words. We can't use that language. And as a health teacher, the bottom line is the reason why the fastest growing group of HIV positive people is African-American females is because we can't get this conversation right in our own community.

MR. SHELTON: What's the question? That's the point.

Q: (Off mike) – consider that our high school students, our preteens are still a viable audience. It's harder to change beliefs when we're talking about 30-year-olds.

MR. SHELTON: Can I just –

MR. CAPEHART: Go right ahead.

MR. SHELTON: Just very, very quickly. I have three young sons. I have a six-year-old, an 11-year-old and a 15-year-old. And each of them are in the school now. They attended the same school.

But you're right. What happens in the kind of socialization in schools, not just on the side – I think the point you're making is very, very important – on the side of those who are just – everyone is discovering their sexuality during those years, the years you're talking about. Some are discovering their sexuality in terms of being gay, lesbian, so forth and so on. Some are discovering their sexuality in being heterosexual. Part of the question is how are those who are discovering their sexuality who are being heterosexual viewing and interpreting those who are discovering their sexuality being gay? So it's a matter of perspective as well.

And how we talk about those issues from a number of different sides, not just those that are grappling – that's important but those who are grappling with their homosexuality but those that are grappling with their heterosexuality, how their perception of those who are grappling with their homosexuality?

Well, in their school, the terminology is consistent with everything else we do and that is to say that you're going to celebrate Dr. King's birthday and talk about the principle piece and the importance of social justice and social change in a non-violent way. When you talk about Free to Be Me Day – they actually do a Free to Be Me Week at my kids' school and whatnot, they're talking about those other issues as well from the various perspectives.

So you're right. Just don't limit the perspective to those who are struggling within that vane but those who are also watching them struggle as they're going through their own struggles.

MR. CAPEHART: The question in the corner.

Q: Hi. My question is for Cornell. My name is Phil Attey and I'm involved in a project that's rolling out this year called Catholics for Equality. And in our development of the campaign, one of the key questions we needed to answer was who are Catholic influentials, who are the influentials that catholic voters respond to and that shape their opinion as American voters? And my question is what kind of research is being done right now as far as who right now are the influentials within the African-American community? Is it still the influence of the black churches? Is it the black entertainment industry? Who right now are the influentials and who do we need as LBGT leaders to be having a dialogue with and encouraging them and giving them the talking points? Thanks.

MR. CAPEHART: Thanks. Thanks, Phil.

MR. BELCHER: That is actually such a – you don't mean it is a loaded question but it is such a loaded question.

MR. SHELTON: Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed.

MR. BELCHER: The truth of the matter is there are influentials everywhere. You know, is the African-American church still an important pillar sort of for influence

in the community? Yes. However, in the polling data, when we sort of talk about whether or not, you know, how much do you follow what the church is saying here, you'd be surprised at how many pull back.

Look, I'm someone who argues now that the influencers aren't up here anymore because, you know what, they're down here. They're grassroots. They're the people in the community. One of the things that we're learning in politics right now, not only in the African-American community but particularly in the African-American and Hispanic community is that, you know what, my best way of reaching or moving an audience is not with a commercial but neighbor to neighbor, sort of door to door, sort of ground activity.

And the other part about this is that, look, over the last two or three years, you know, the supposed influencers, the people who have influence in a (pedantry ?) class have gotten everything wrong, I mean, from – I spent two years working on a campaign where all the influencers say it was no way in hell this guy was going to be president. He wasn't going to win the primary. That was the influencer – that was the conventional thinking but the grassroots had a different sort of take on it, different ideal.

I would argue that right now democracy is more bottom up than top down, that the people up top who are supposedly the influencers and supposedly know all this stuff, they really don't know jack about actually what's going on sort of in the streets.

You know, the truth of the matter is, particularly in a campaign, would I rather have the endorsement of a prominent African-American clergyman in a congressional district or would I rather my campaign had the backing of the morning talk show host on black radio? You know, it is not as quick a cut to the clergyman as you'd think.

I think anywhere where you've got grassroots, people who are actually in the community and in the neighborhood and those voices – I would take them all day long over the people who are up top who are supposedly the influencers and sort of driving the pedantry class. That's in a nutshell. I know it's a loaded question.

MR. CAPEHART: And Nicole wanted to jump in. And then we have time for one question. So as you're responding, I've got to figure out who.

MS. MASON: Okay. In terms of thinking about movement building and organizing, I think it's really time for us to shift our paradigm and get away from looking and trying to find the influential, the one person who's going to tell the community what to do and they're going to do it. That's just not how things work these days. We have people getting information from a variety of different sources. We have strong grassroots movements who are of communities that there isn't a leader. There's a new model of leadership that's emerging. So I think we need to be paying attention to those models and really thinking about how we can build effective coalitions across differences, across communities to really push an issue and move it forward.

MR. CAPEHART: Thanks. And the last question goes to you. Pithy question, pithy answer and we'll be done at 10:30 a.m.

Q: Okay. I just want to say thank you all for being here today. I've learned a lot. If you would, take out your pen and write down, [sisterspaceandbooks.com](http://sisterspaceandbooks.com). And the reason I say that is not only because I own the bookstore and I need your support but when you look at my website, you'll see another way of engaging the community.

I have a project listed on my website. I have a sister, a lesbian who's going to teach a writing class. I have young people who will come to the store and learn about James Baldwin and Lorraine Hansberry.

As a matter of fact, I had a call two days ago from a mother who called and said, why should she send her daughter there, because we have so many lesbian events there? And I said, well, she may grow up to be a lesbian so when you like for her to know that there's an option, that she could grow up and be a lesbian writer if she wanted to be.

One concern I had here today was – and I had four people with me and we made a decision last night that they wouldn't come. And part of that had to do with the fact that we had asked that we would be able to come down and sell books of Michael Eric Dyson. I had 150 copies of his book. That book would allow me by selling that book I would not have to worry about paying the rent. And that's what I'm worried about next month, okay.

And as a lesbian and someone who's active in the community and someone who knows what's going on in D.C., because I've been here since 1982 and nothing has really changed since I've been here. So I know what's happening out there and if I call and say, I'm glad you're having this but let me be a part of it as a business person, you may want to think about whether or not you could spare 10 minutes to allow Michael Eric Dyson to sign his book. And I don't want to –

MR. CAPEHART: Ma'am, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Q: So the other part of it is that if you really want to get back to the community and have another discussion, please think about to SisterSpace and Books and let's have some of these discussions because it is needed.

MR. CAPEHART: All right. Thank you. All right. I want to give someone an opportunity to ask a question and sort – the young woman here with her – stand up so you can get the mike. And may I beg –

Q: I'm quick. I'm quick. Don't worry.

MR. CAPEHART: A question and fast.

Q: It's a question. I sort of wanted – first off, thank you for this panel. It's been incredibly informative and I really appreciate hearing sort of you all's thoughts and views on it, on this issue.

What I'm wondering is if you can expand a little bit on a point that Dr. Dyson touched on briefly in discussing sort of these intersections of oppressions and how in a lot of ways people who have multiple identities are forced to choose which one they have to live with almost in a way in which we're competing to see who is more oppressed in what community.

I think in some ways the discussion today has even sort of slipped into that at moments where we're figuring out, well, who's to blame for the homophobic nature in LGBT or the racist nature in LGBT organizations or who's to blame for the homophobic nature in the black community.

And I'm wondering how do expand beyond that conversation to where we're not competing to see who's more oppressed here but how we're connected in the same struggle for equal rights.

MR. CAPEHART: That's a great question to end on. And I'm going to go down the row –

MR. BELCHER: Don't start with me. (Laughter.)

MR. CAPEHART: Fine. Rashad Robinson from GLAAD. Answer the question. Remember, pithy.

MR. ROBINSON: Thanks, Cornell. I think it's really about elevating the voices and the stories of black LGBT people. I think that the only way to really change this conversation of us versus them is to really show the intersections and to elevate folks who really share that common ground.

You know, until I came out, my only identity was as Everton Shirley's (sp) son. Both my parents are black. I grew up as a black boy in Long Island in a largely white community so I knew I was black everyday and kind of reminded of it. And so to the extent like I ever think about choosing my identity, it's not even a conversation.

And so I think really elevating this conversation and really elevating more black folks who are out and having those conversations and for straight allies who are African-American in your communities, you have a responsibility as well. You have to stand up and you have to be – (inaudible).

MR. CAPEHART: Hilary Shelton, NAACP.

MR. SHELTON: Very good. It goes back to – (inaudible). Quite frankly, we each have something to teach about ourselves, everything that we are. We just that we come from many different experiences, challenges, concerns and backgrounds.

With that being in mind, in order to teach somebody, you have to first reach them but you have to reach them where they're at, which means you have to understand where they're at which is things like civics is so important and always the first to go when we're talking about educational cutbacks. Now, civics is so important in understand where issues are coming from, what our experiences are as we have that conversation.

As a communications major in undergraduate school, you understand there are many different kinds of noise that get between the messenger and the mesengee (sp), that is the person who is sending the message and the person receiving it. But with that understanding more of where they are and how they got where they are, you can cut through a lot of that noise and be very clear about it. This is a very, very important point of our tool of teaching.

It would also help prevent us from making some of the same mistakes that Cornell's study ends up showing and that is is that if you understand how tightly held one's experiences and challenges and even victories are in this country as a people, we think about whoever you are, for whatever your background is, how you triumphed to the point that you are here today, then invariably you will also recognize that in everyone else too. So again, it's just important understand that background to move ahead.

MR. CAPEHART: Professor Mason from NYU.

MS. MASON: Okay. The first thing I want to say is that we all have points of privilege and points of oppression and I think it's really in terms of using an intersectional framework that's really important to understand and to realize and bring it to the conversation.

And the first – and the next thing is that I live at the intersections. We all live at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexual identity, sexual orientation. Now, white men may not believe they live at the intersection but whiteness and maleness do intersect. And so, when we're thinking about doing our work across differences and using an intersectional approach, it's very important to realize where those things happen and converge.

And in terms of movement building and moving this work forward I don't think any of us here are looking for someone to blame. We're looking for how do we understand what the issues are, how do we move the agenda and who do we need to bring to the table, who is the "we" that we need to be including in these conversations.

MR. CAPEHART: Professor Dyson from Georgetown.

MR. DYSON: Yes, sir. I think that when we think about these intersections we have to talk about dangerous intersections. You've lived on them. You've seen them. The traffic is pretty heavy there. We have to be very cautious about how we proceed because otherwise, if we do it simultaneously, perhaps we end up with a big crash and a big bang.

I don't want to make too much of that metaphor but it is something important to understand that there are a lot of mes inside of me. Howard Thurman who I quoted earlier said, make me unanimous in myself. There's a lot of competition in one's own psyche, in one's own soul, in one's own spirit. And I think that one has to be aware of that and these intersections that happen, everybody ain't affected the same way.

Professor Mason just talked about points of privileges and points of oppression. Everybody ain't equally disposed. Even if you're on the Titanic, one person is Kate Winslet. The other person is the DeCaprio. One of them didn't survive. They both were on the boat. Do you see what I'm saying? But, at the same time, you can be in first class and I can be in coach. If the plane starts shaking, everybody shaking together and if the plane goes down, we're all going down. So the reality is you've got to figure out, even if you have a relative privilege, you are ultimately victimized by the very thing that you think you are immune to.

And then finally, I'll say – I think what Sister Epps talked about that very important about choice. I mean, one of the ways in which we can talk about it is Barbara Christian, the late great theorist said, we don't want to engage in an oppression derby, like my oppression is better than yours. No, mine's worst than yours. No. The holocaust is not as bad as slavery. No, slavery is not as bad as – and then you get on.

And then the thing is the kernel of our humanity must be elevated and the force of the oppression that faces us regardless of who we are must be opposed, whether you're gay or lesbian or transgender or bisexual, whether you're African-American, Latino, first nation, whether you're rich or poor from a developing nation or from the first world, you've got to understand that the central reality is your humanity and what affects and impacts my humanity must be acknowledged.

And therefore, the choice that we make is to be human. Let's not demonize choice because the same way African-American people wanted the choice to go to whatever school, or choice to go to whatever fountain, the denial of that opportunity was the *bête noir*, was the horrible thing, and the choice becomes the good thing.

And I think when we do that, then we can see that we want to make a world free enough where the choices that people can engage in legally and morally will be accessible to them without the encumbrance of any kind of ism, race, class, sex orientation and the like.

MR. CAPEHART: And Cornell Belcher, Brilliant Corners.

MR. BELCHER: How the hell do you follow that up? (Laughter.)

(Cross talk.)

MR. BELCHER: Actually, I don't have a lot to add to what my brilliant panelist just said. I mean, I will say this. I think part of the beauty of this is having the conversation, having the dialogue and continuing to have the conversation and dialogue.

I mean, I was in Paris last month doing some work because all of a sudden, when you help elect a black person president, other people around the country and the world want to talk to you. And when I was talking to some of the young brothers and sisters over there – I mean, it is an issue with this ideal of their being immigrants or them being black or brown because you're all just supposed to be French. So it's taboo to be even have the conversation about identity other than French.

However, they keep coming up with disproportionate sort of – they actually know discrimination is there. There's only like one person of color in their whole assembly, in their whole national assembly. So clearly there's racism going there but they're blocked from having the conversation so it becomes taboo.

So I think the beauty of it here is just to continue to have the conversation and the dialogue about identity and sort of you being sort of immigrant or you being black or brown doesn't take away from your Frenchness. And so having that conversation about – here where we can have that conversation and all these identities actually make up one America and in the end, sort of this Americanism, this great American ideal comes from that.

So my only point is to have the conversation, to keep challenging people in that conversation because you'd be surprised at how in a lot of parts in the world the conversation is actually taboo.

MR. CAPEHART: Please thank our panelists for this great discussion. My apologies for going late.

(Applause.)

(END)