

Resource Guide to

for African Americans

COMING OUT



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We are thrilled to present the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's *Resource Guide to Coming Out for African Americans*. This is part of our ongoing effort to provide coming out information specifically for people of color. It's just one way we are working hard every day to ensure that HRC is inclusive and affirming for all members of our community.

HRC is on a journey as we continue to address the additional challenges of being African American and making the decision to come out as same-gender loving, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

We hope that this new guide is a helpful starting point for your coming out journey or the journey of someone you know. As you read it, know that you are not alone. Countless others, in small towns, big cities, and here at HRC, are on the same exciting journey.

We share some stories here of several amazing people from the African-American community who have left their indelible mark on this country. With you, we embrace their incredible legacy.

Remember, coming out is one of the most powerful things any of us can do. No one should be denied the right to live fully as a human because of his or her sexual orientation or gender expression or identity.

At HRC, we will continue to strive to ensure that all same-gender loving Americans can be open, honest and safe at home, at work and in their communities.



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cheryl".

Cheryl A. Jacques
President
Human Rights Campaign



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julian".

Julian J. High
Human Resources & Diversity Director
Human Rights Campaign



NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY...

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INTRODUCTION



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I wish I had come out sooner.

But I think fear can paralyze you and trap you into silence. It's the fear of going against your religious upbringing, of losing friends and family and of disappointing the important people in life. But I found that coming out and being honest with my family and friends has created much stronger bonds.

Ramon Gardenhire,
HRC law fellow



Coming out can be one of the most challenging events in your life, but also one of the most rewarding. Being attracted to someone of the same sex or understanding that your gender identity is different from your biological sex can be frightening. Some African Americans feel pressure to prioritize their different identities.

“Perhaps the most maddening question anyone can ask me is, ‘Which do you put first: being black or being a woman, being black or being gay?’” wrote Barbara Smith, in her essay, “Blacks and Gays Healing the Great Divide” (*Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays, and the Struggle for Equality*, New Press, 1999). “The underlying assumption is that I should prioritize one of my identities because one of them is actually more important than the rest or that I must arbitrarily choose one of them over the others for the sake of acceptance in one particular community.”

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

To come out is to identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. The first person you have to reveal this to is yourself. After that, you can deal with friends and family. For many people, the coming out process is difficult. But most people come out because sooner or later, they can't stand hiding who they are any more. Once they've come out, most people acknowledge that it feels much better to be open and honest than to conceal such an integral part of themselves.

Many people identify as gay or lesbian because their primary attractions — both emotional and physical — are to members of the same sex. Many people who are attracted to both men and women identify as bisexual. Some transgender people say they felt like they were trapped in the wrong body for as long as they can remember. And sometimes people don't feel comfortable with any of these labels or they choose a mix of them. The important thing is to be honest with yourself and — when you're ready — to be honest with others about who you are and to whom you are attracted.

Figuring out who you are can be very difficult — and it can take time. Remember, however, that most of those negative stereotypes of GLBT people you may have heard are based on erroneous or inadequate information. And what you need are the facts.



BARBARA

A woman of many political firsts, Barbara Jordan was born Feb. 21, 1936, in Houston. She belonged to the honor society at Phyllis Wheatley High School, then graduated *magna cum laude* from Texas Southern University in 1956, and earned her law degree from Boston University in 1959.

After returning to Houston to practice law, Jordan ran for office and was elected to the Texas Senate in 1966, the first female African American to do so. In 1972, she was elected president *pro tempore* of the Texas Senate, becoming the first African American elected to preside over a legislative body anywhere in the country. When Jordan was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1972, she became the first African-American woman in Congress to represent a previously Confederate state.

In 1976, Barbara Jordan became the first African-American woman to deliver a keynote speech at a political convention, the Democratic National Convention, which she addressed again in 1992. In 1994, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor. After three terms in Congress, Jordan retired from politics in 1979 and joined the faculty of the University of Texas at Austin.

Jordan lived with her partner, Nancy Earl, in their home in Texas. The two met on a camping trip in the 1960s and lived together for two decades. Jordan relied on Earl to help in her day-to-day struggles with multiple sclerosis and leukemia. In 1976, they built a house in Austin. In July 1988, Earl saved Jordan's life when she nearly drowned after losing consciousness in their backyard swimming pool. Earl — longtime companion, co-owner of their home, executor of her estate, primary care giver and lifesaver — is often omitted from or trivialized in biographies of Jordan.

At her funeral in 1996, Jordan was eulogized by then-President Clinton and former Texas Gov. Ann Richards, both of whom extended specific condolences to Earl. Jordan was buried at the Texas State Cemetery — an honor reserved for Texas heroes. She was the first African-American woman to be buried there.

JORDAN

(1936 – 1996)

SAME-GENDER LOVING

People of different sexual orientations and gender identities refer to themselves in a variety of ways. For instance, some African Americans use the term “same-gender loving.” Others use gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender — GLBT. In this document, you will see the letters GLBT used. This in no way means to discredit those who prefer “same-gender loving.”

AM I BISEXUAL?

Bisexual people are attracted to both men and women. A bisexual person may not be equally attracted to both sexes, however, and the degree of attraction may vary over time as one’s sexual identity develops. No “test” exists to determine whether you are bisexual. Some people acknowledge their bisexuality after a period of identifying as gay or lesbian. At first, you may not know what to call your sexual feelings or whether you feel sufficiently attracted to both sexes to consider yourself bisexual. But there’s no measuring stick to decide what amount of attraction to other genders is necessary to identify as bisexual. In addition, you may hear some of the common myths about bisexual people — they can’t make up their minds; they can’t commit to long-term relationships. Don’t listen. And don’t feel you need to hurry into a decision. Coming out — whether you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender — is a precious journey.

THE FACTS

No one knows how many people are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. The most reputable estimates are skewed by the fact that many people are afraid or unwilling during surveys to identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender — even when assured of anonymity. Whatever the numbers, the facts are the same:

YOUR SEXUALITY OR GENDER IDENTITY IS NOT A CHOICE. IT CHOOSES YOU.

Some people say that sexuality or gender identity is a choice to discourage you from gay or lesbian relationships or from being comfortable with expressing your gender in the way that feels right to you. But think about it for a minute: Did you choose to have feelings of same-sex attraction? Did you choose your sex at birth? Sexuality and gender identity are not choices any more than being left-handed or having brown eyes or being heterosexual are choices. They are a part of who you are. The choice is in deciding how to live your life.

IT'S OK TO BE YOURSELF.

In the 1970s, the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association revised their positions on homosexuality. Both determined that homosexuality is not a mental disorder. In 1994, the American Medical Association released a statement saying, “Most of the emotional disturbance experienced by gay men and lesbians around their sexual identity is not based on physiological causes but rather is due more to a sense of alienation in an unaccepting environment.”

Nonetheless, some people might try to tell you that you are sick and that you need professional help to “change.” No scientifically valid evidence exists that shows that people can change their sexual orientation, although some people do repress it. The most reputable medical and psychotherapeutic groups say you should not try to change your sexual orientation.

Most important, remember that the problems people have dealing with their sexuality come from society and its treatment of GLBT people — not from being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. It's OK to seek help in dealing with the confusing feelings you may have about your sexual orientation or your gender identity. Understanding and being honest with yourself as well as coming out are critical milestones in life. As with any other

WHAT DOES TRANSGENDER MEAN?

Transgender is a term that describes a broad range of people who experience and/or express their gender somewhat differently from what most people expect. It is an overarching term that includes transsexual people and cross-dressers as well as anyone expressing gender characteristics that don't correspond with characteristics traditionally ascribed to the person's sex or presumed sex. It is not a sexual orientation. Some transgender people may define themselves as female-to-male or male-to-female transsexual, and may take hormones prescribed by a doctor and undergo medical procedures for sex reassignment surgery. And some people identify as transgender because they don't feel comfortable with either the male or female gender exclusively.

significant step in your life, you might seek professional help through the process. Just remember: The anxiety you are feeling is primarily the result of family or social prejudice against GLBT people.

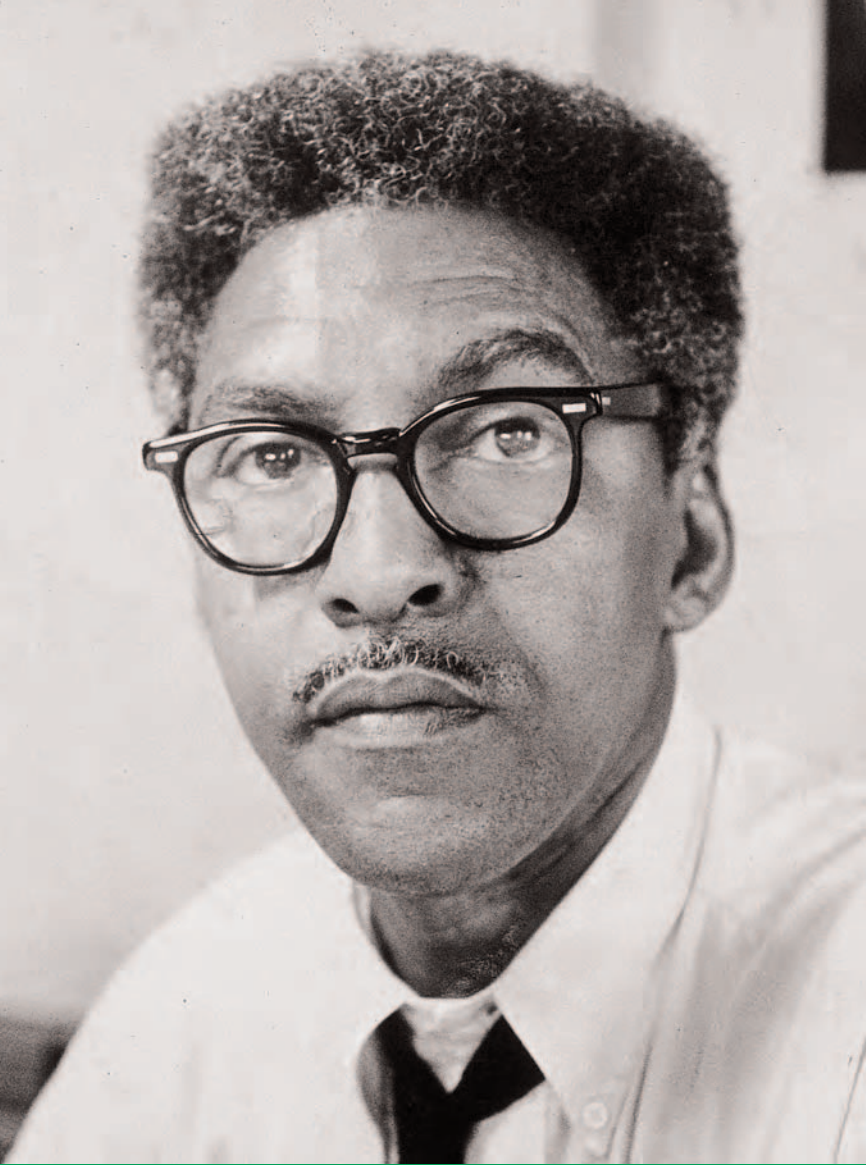
BEING GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL OR TRANSGENDER IS NATURAL.

You've probably heard some people say that men are "meant" to be with women, and women are "meant" to be with men — or that you should be a "real man" or be more "feminine." They may say that unless you are straight, you are going against nature and morality. But if being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is unnatural, why would it occur, generation after generation, despite some cultures' strong prohibitions? The fact is same-sex love and gender variance has occurred throughout history, in every nation and culture. They are natural variations among humans, and may have occurred somewhere in your own family's history. When people say being GLBT is unnatural, they mean it is against their preconceived idea of, or conditioned assumptions about, what is natural.

GLBT PEOPLE CONSTITUTE FAMILIES.

Some people talk as if there are two options in life: You can marry someone of the opposite sex and become a family or you can be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender and be excluded from the definition of family. This is patently untrue. Further, it is a position perpetuated by religious political extremists who have a stake in portraying GLBT people as outside the mainstream. The fact is that GLBT people make up families just as other people do.

Unfortunately, GLBT families often are not protected under law like married couples. Thus, there are special considerations for you to make when you decide to have a child or when you and your partner commit to one another. If you are coming out as transgender or transsexual and you already have children, there are additional considerations. If you want to learn more about GLBT families and get documents to protect your family, visit www.hrc.org/familynet.



BAYARD

An openly gay leader in the civil rights movement, Bayard Rustin was raised by his grandmother in a Pennsylvania Quaker community. Rustin's activism began at 25 when he moved to New York City to organize youth around desegregation. While others in the movement hadn't yet embraced commitments to non-violence, Rustin refused to register for the draft based on his pacifist beliefs and spent three years in a federal penitentiary.

Soon after his release, Rustin helped plan the first Freedom Ride. With his fellow riders who were challenging Jim Crow laws on buses and trains in the South, Rustin was beaten, harassed, arrested and fined. Throughout his career, he worked closely with Martin Luther King Jr. and A. Phillip Randolph in laying the foundations for the movement and key groups, including the Congress of Racial Equality and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Perhaps Rustin's most memorable role was as the chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. His participation caused excitement by many with whom he worked and opposition by others. In July 1963, then-Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., took to the floor of the U.S. Senate to denounce the upcoming march by calling attention to Rustin's homosexuality. Despite the controversy, Rustin's behind-the-scenes work was crucial to the success of the historic event.

Over the course of his life, Rustin played a crucial role in massive student protests for a variety of progressive issues, desegregation of the armed forces, the Montgomery bus boycott, anti-war demonstrations, fair labor rallies and countless international human rights campaigns. In recognizing his legacy, Rustin's detractors and followers agree that no one accomplished both the enormous logistical tasks of mass political movements and the delicate diplomacy of coalition building like he did.

RUSTIN

(1936 - 1996)



AFRICAN AMERICANS



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“Coming out has been a continual process for me in which I’ve become increasingly committed to achieving full equality, including marriage. I don’t simply want to be tolerated or accepted, I want to be treated with the same dignity and respect as every other human being.”

Michael Crawford,
HRC associate field director



Certainly being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender in addition to being a person of color makes life more challenging. You will be required to develop the courage to honor your own experience of love and self-identification above anyone else's judgments about it. But you can do it. And, when you are ready, you can take the next step — you can come out.

For many African Americans, coming out involves additional cultural factors that make the process more challenging but no less rewarding. It includes having to deal with homophobic churches, strong family foundations that emphasize heterosexuality, homophobia in the black community and racism in the broader GLBT community. However, thanks to brave GLBT African-American activists and their allies working toward change in the church and the community, there is more support and acceptance than ever before.

RELIGION AND COMING OUT

The church has traditionally informed, influenced and guided the day-to-day lives of many African Americans. “The black church is not just a place of spirituality and enlightenment, but a place of empowerment for African Americans,” says David Neale, founder of Black Lavender Resources, a Wheaton, Md., consulting firm specializing in diversity within the GLBT community.

Bishop Kwabena Rainey Cheeks, of Inner Light Ministries in Washington, D.C., agrees. “Spirituality is almost impossible to separate from black life,” says Cheeks. “The church is a stabilizing force and a place to connect not just to God but to community, as well.”

Yet some in those churches have been unwelcoming to people with a different sexual orientation or gender identity.

“The black church, the oldest institution and pillar of the black community, has historically dictated the community's stance on homosexuality — either you don't talk about it, or you condemn it,” says Lynn d Johnson, online editor

of *Vibe* magazine and adjunct professor at Metropolitan College of New York. It is daunting to come out only to face the fear and misunderstanding

The world is before you, and
you need not take it or leave it as it was
before you came in.

James Baldwin,
author

of society in general. But many GLBT African Americans must face that same ignorance within the very institution that has for so many been the centerpiece of their community. Although most African-American denominations have not issued a public statement outlining their position on homosexuality, the stances of individual churches and ministers are revealed on Sundays.

“The motto of the black church seems to be ‘don’t name it, don’t claim it,’” says Mandy Carter, a founder of the progressive organization Southerners on New Ground. This informal church dictum has led many GLBT African Americans to find and create other places to exercise their spirituality.

As Bishop Cheeks put it, “I would rather sit in a tree and talk to God than go to a church that doesn’t affirm me as a gay man.” Bishop Cheeks has worked hard to ensure that his church, Inner Light Ministries, is a diverse and inclusive church for GLBT worshippers.

Some gay-affirming churches, such as the United Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, are ethnically and racially inclusive. But over the past few decades, new churches also have been established specifically to welcome and affirm GLBT people of color. One is the Unity Fellowship Church Movement, founded in 1985 by Rev. Carl Bean and other gay and lesbian African Americans. The church now has 15 locations across the country.

Some long-established black churches also have made progress toward being more welcoming.

In April 2000, the Union United Methodist Church in Boston voted to become the nation’s first black Methodist church to officially welcome and include gay and lesbian worshippers.

That same year the United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church was founded. The church engages people in the subject of heterosexism and homophobia in Christianity and the United Methodist Church. “We are accomplices through our silence on these issues,” says Rev. Gil Caldwell, who sits on its advisory board. “We must connect the struggles, as different as they are.”

Individual pastors also are making a difference.

“I hope I’m doing some sharing of faith that recognizes all human beings as God’s creation,” says Rev. Timothy McDonald III, the founding pastor of the First Iconium Baptist Church in Atlanta. “The pastor sets the tone. If the pastor is scared, homophobic and sends out negative signals

about gays and lesbians, it's going to spread throughout the congregation.”

In 1998, the Human Rights Campaign hosted its first Gospel & Soul, an event designed to reach out and build coalitions with African-American churches and ministers who support gay civil rights. Since then, Gospel & Soul celebrations have occurred in Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Raleigh and Detroit.

“As leaders of this community, we must challenge ourselves to move ... from this place of joyful celebration into our black churches and communities — boldly encouraging and engaging in discourse about sexuality,” Rev. Kelly Brown Douglas said at the 2000 HRC Gospel & Soul event in Atlanta. Brown is an associate professor of theology at Howard University’s School of Divinity.

As more churches open their doors to GLBT parishioners and more leaders publicly recognize those of different sexual orientations and gender identities, fewer GLBT African Americans will be forced to choose between their identities and their faiths.

To find a welcome and affirming place of worship near you, contact the GLBT religious organizations listed in the back of this guide.

FAMILY AND COMING OUT

Coming out to family is often one of the most difficult experiences for a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person. And for African Americans, it may be particularly challenging, says Sean Carmago, former senior adviser on diversity and communities of color at Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, a national group based in Washington, D.C.

“The black family unit is a very strong one,” says Carmago. “In a world where racism is still far too prevalent, the family is a haven, a stronghold of support.”

For many, there is no place in this fortress of strength for a “weakness,” as homosexuality is often viewed. Parents sometimes think that having a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender child is detrimental and damaging to the black family and will negatively affect the whole African-American community.

As the late African-American lesbian author Audre Lorde described it: “Within black communities where racism is a living reality, differences among us often seem dangerous and suspect. The need for unity is often misnamed as a need for homogeneity.” (*Sister Outsider: Essays and Poems*. Crossing Press, 1984.)

Despite the challenges that coming out in the black family presents, many GLBT African Americans choose to share their orientation or identity with their relatives. Being honest with your family is an important step in getting all parts of your life to fit together. One of the most important things is to give family members time to process the information.

“My mom thought at first that I could no longer be the torchbearer and political leader in the community that she had expected me to be,” recalls Donna Payne, senior constituency field organizer for the Human Rights Campaign. “But as she came to accept and understand who I was, she was able to see that my role as torchbearer was still just as important.”

Just as you may have needed information and support in coming out, know that your family may also need more information and support. For Those We Love is a program founded specifically to support African-American families of GLBT people. Founder William Beale of

Washington, D.C., the father of a gay son, was involved in PFLAG but felt that others would feel more comfortable in an African American-only support group.

To the people that we love,
I think the greatest gift we can give is to
be who we are, as we find out who we
are. That is the greatest gift.

Alice Walker,
author

“I’d see one other black person at the local PFLAG meeting, but they’d never return. My guess

was that they didn’t feel comfortable ‘airing their dirty laundry’ in that setting,” says Beale. “Some feel homosexuality should only be shared or discussed with others like themselves.”

To date, For Those We Love and similar programs can be found in Washington, D.C., Washington state, Michigan and Ohio. PFLAG has also formed a Families of Color Network, which strives to keep good, strong, healthy families united by love, addresses issues of institutionalized racism and works to break down barriers of sexual orientation and gender identity within communities of color.

GLBT AFRICAN AMERICANS IN AMERICA

Many people see the GLBT community as a microcosm of society in that it faces the same economic, racial, domestic and class issues as the rest of the American public. It is understandable, then, that similar challenges with social issues will exist. Some African Americans don't feel comfortable or welcome in the broader GLBT community or movement that many view as historically white-focused.

"Whether it's intentional or not, when GLBT organizations are predominately white, it discourages people of color. They look at the faces, don't see anyone like themselves and think, 'I have no place here,'" says Mandy Carter, African-American lesbian activist. Carter points to the growth of black pride celebrations as evidence that African Americans need to see other people like themselves. "Some people think that having black prides is somehow divisive, but I see it as another way to affirm the still too frequent invisibility of same-gender-loving blacks."

GLBT African Americans have been virtually invisible in history. Without civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, there would have been no 1963 March on Washington for Civil Rights. But most history books rarely mention Rustin and they almost never acknowledge that he was gay. The names of deceased singer Ma Rainey, pro baseball player Glenn Burke and the late Rep. Barbara Jordan, D-Texas, might be found in history books but their sexual orientation is not. Telling their stories is a powerful way to educate others and inspire young African Americans who are coming to terms with their sexual orientation.

During the coming out process, it's important to know you are not the only one, and for many African Americans this is a challenge since images of GLBT people in the media or entertainment world rarely show GLBT people of color.

"The LGBT images we see in entertainment are overwhelmingly white males — and this only makes LGBT people of color feel more invisible," says Scott Seomin, entertainment media director at the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.

That visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which is also the source of our greatest strength.

Audre Lorde,
author

Some people in our community see being GLBT as being a roadblock.

I'm here to tell you that it is not. Sure, I have to take three deep breaths in the morning to do what I have to do. I don't want people to think that it is easy. But it's very important to love and accept who you are.

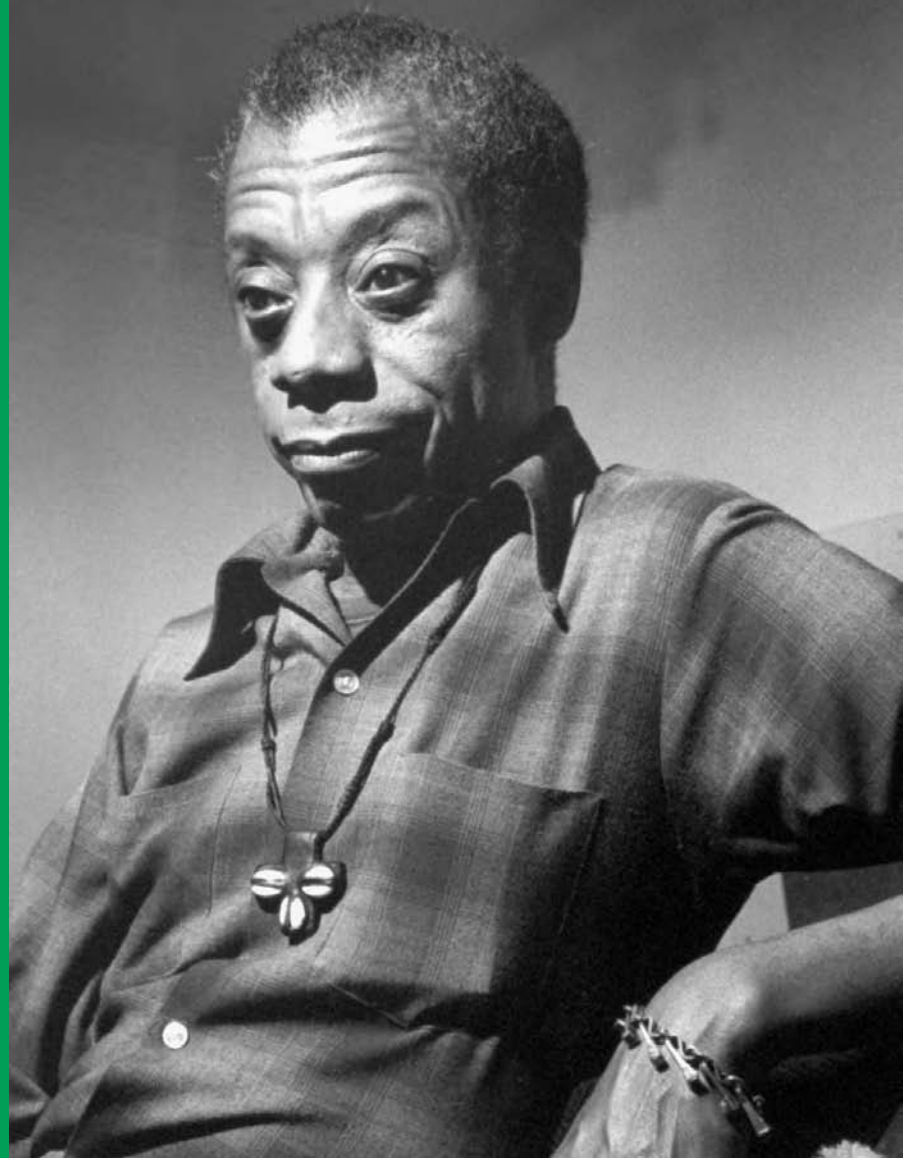
Emil Wilbekin,
editorial director and vice president, Vibe



“I actually had a difficult time coming out of the closet because there was a part of me that didn’t believe I was gay. Why? Because I was such a television child and I never saw images of myself on television,” says Loren Javier, GLAAD’s former cultural interest media manager. “All gay men were white to me. And it took more work for me to come out and try to accept the fact that I was gay. ... Images have gotten more diverse than when I was a child, but at the same time, it isn’t representative of the whole community.”

These invisibilities underscore the importance of African-American GLBT role models — whether they are local heroes or national figures — in the coming out process. Ken Reeves, an openly gay African American and the former mayor of Cambridge, Mass., often calls attention to the lack of visibility of openly gay black men.

“It is remarkable that we are still in the shadows,” Reeves said in an address at the 1997 Chicago Black LesBiGay/Trans Unity Conference. “We are a people who must stand up and say who we are. We have to grow. You have to come out and tell this story. You cannot tell it in darkness!



JAMES

As a child, James Baldwin turned to reading as a means of escape from his troubled relationship with his stepfather, a Pentecostal minister. At Frederick Douglass Junior High, the young author edited the school paper and belonged to the literary club advised by black poet Countee Cullen. For a brief time in his teens, Baldwin was a junior minister at a Harlem church, drawing crowds larger than those of his stepfather. In his later teens, Baldwin left the church and Christianity, but throughout his writing career he used biblical cadences and imagery.

A few years after graduating from high school, Baldwin settled in Greenwich Village to focus on his writing. It was there that he met celebrated black author Richard Wright, who became his mentor and father figure. Baldwin had numerous essays published during this time, leading to a Rosenwald Fellowship, which he used to buy a one-way ticket to Paris.

As an openly gay African American, Baldwin was increasingly aware of prevailing racial and sexual prejudices in America. Though he visited the United States and much of his writing concerned his home country, Baldwin was to be an expatriate writer for most of the next 40 years. Still, he was a very public part of the U.S. civil rights movement and organized key meetings between then-Attorney General Robert Kennedy and celebrities like Harry Belafonte and Lorraine Hansberry.

Baldwin's personal essays on discrimination made him a prominent and eloquent voice for both the civil and gay rights movements. His books "Giovanni's Room" (1956) and "Another Country" (1962) created controversy because they featured normalized depictions of gay relationships as well as characters who struggled with their sexual identities.

Baldwin's writing career spanned four decades and included essays, poetry, plays, fiction, non-fiction and children's books. He collaborated with anthropologist Margaret Mead, poet Nikki Giovanni and writer Alex Haley on various projects, and taught at several American universities. After years as a writer in France, Baldwin was made a commander in the French Legion of Honor in 1986.

While working on a biography and play about Martin Luther King Jr., Baldwin died in France in 1987. At his memorial service, good friends and fellow writers Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou thanked him for his influence on their writing.

BALDWIN

(1924 – 1987)



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A LIFELONG JOURNEY

"Coming out for me was about freeing myself and not having to hide anymore."

Dibri Gamble,
student



Coming out to yourself, your friends and families is a huge part of the journey toward being honest about your sexual orientation. But coming out is more than just telling those close to you. It is a challenging process that continues throughout your life and across all of its facets, as the following sections indicate.

Many opportunities will arise where you will need to choose whether to come out as a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person — whether it's on the job, at a church picnic, while having a conversation on the bus or when filling out a form in your doctor's office. Almost daily, you will face having to make decisions about when and where to come out. But

remember, take as much time as you need — this is your journey. And be sure to find help through local support groups or online contacts.

I have been out and open

for 20 years. But there are still moments when I have to make a conscious decision to be honest about who I am, especially within my own black community.

Brandon Braud,
coordinator of HRC's
historically black colleges and
universities outreach program

COMING OUT IN THE WORKPLACE

One of the biggest risks you may face is coming out on the job. It's a decision that has the potential to affect your livelihood because there is no federal law that protects you from being fired merely because you're gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Some employers have policies against such discrimination — but most do not. It's important to know the law in your state or city, and know your employer's policy before coming out at work. For more information, visit www.hrc.org/worknet.

It's not always easy to come out on the job — even if you've already come out to your family and friends. When Linda Villarosa went to work at *Essence* magazine, she was afraid to come out to her boss and colleagues — even though she had come out in college a few years earlier. But, once again, she found she couldn't stand hiding any more, and she took the chance. “My boss and I were in her car coming back from a weekend editorial retreat, and she was saying something about fixing me up with her brother-in-law. And I just blurted out, ‘I'm a lesbian.’ She was embarrassed about the brother-in-law and very kind. And that Monday, I came out to just about everybody else at work, and everyone was fine.”

While some workplaces can be supportive, it's important to remember that, currently, only 14 states and the District of Columbia have laws protecting you from discrimination based on sexual orientation. Further, four states have statutes and 67 cities and counties have laws that protect you from discrimination based on your gender identity and expression. Additionally, a number of other states interpret their existing non-discrimination laws to protect transgender people.

COMING OUT TO YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

Being honest about your sexual orientation or gender identity can be a matter of life and death — or, at a minimum, essential to getting effective care and treatment. Some of the people who may most need to know the truth about your orientation or identity are your health care providers. Coming out to them can be hard, however, because inaccurate information exists across the medical community about the treatment of GLBT patients.

A number of health care providers still mistakenly presume all patients are heterosexual. As a result, it can be awkward when a doctor or nurse asks whether you are sexually active and what kind of birth control you use. Their ignorance encourages many GLBT people to delay or avoid getting the care they need. And it keeps many from talking with their providers about promoting good health and preventing disease in an informed, open way.

If you are not ready to come out to your own health care provider, perhaps you would feel more comfortable talking with a gay-friendly one. Your local GLBT community center may be able to help you. In addition, feel free to contact GLBT health organizations such as the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association that are willing to educate physicians and protect your anonymity at the same time.

Similarly, if you have a therapist, make sure he or she is knowledgeable about issues facing GLBT people. A number of providers remain ill-informed, particularly about transgender issues — and could give inaccurate or damaging advice. You can find information on GLBT-friendly therapists and counselors from the provider directory on www.gayhealth.com.

COMING OUT IN THE MILITARY

If you are a member of the U.S. military, you can lose your job if you come out. If you want to stay in the military, remember that anything you say can be used against you. If you do want to leave, saying the wrong thing may ruin your discharge or result in a court-martial. Some commands have acted professionally and tried to protect service members' privacy. Others, however, have allowed or condoned gossip and harassment against service-members who have come out.

You may see coming out as a matter of honesty. Others who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender may feel differently. They may come out and seek discharge as a means of escaping anti-gay threats and harassment — or because they find they are unable to serve in a homophobic military. Whatever your reasons, it's in your best interest to get professional advice before acting. Contact information for the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network can be found at the back of this book.

CONCLUSION

Being African American and coming out as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender — or same-gender loving — may be an extremely challenging experience, but many find that it is unexpectedly rewarding. You not only free yourself from the confinement of the closet, but you also free others from their ignorance about issues related to sexual orientation or gender identity.

The presence of open GLBT African Americans in the church and within the family will be key to changing the homophobic atmosphere in those institutions. “If we are going to change things, we have to become visible,” says HRC's Payne. You will find that coming out is not a one-time event, but rather a lifelong journey. Browse some resources to help take you, your friends and your family on that important path.



AUDRE

The daughter of Caribbean immigrants who settled in Harlem, author and activist Audre Lorde was a self-described “Black lesbian, mother, warrior, poet.” Her struggle against oppression on many fronts was expressed with a force and clarity that made her a valued voice for women, African Americans, and the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.

In 1968, Lorde began teaching at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Miss., where violent backlash to the civil rights movement remained a serious threat. It was during this time that she began to weave her artistic talents with her dedication to the struggle against injustice. Lorde was at the center of the movement to preserve and celebrate African-American culture and was a featured speaker at the first national march for gay and lesbian liberation in Washington, D.C., in 1979.

Lorde bravely documented her 14-year battle against cancer in “The Cancer Journals” and in her book of essays “A Burst of Light.” Never hiding that she had breast cancer, Lorde shed light on a medical establishment that was frequently indifferent to cultural differences and insensitive to women’s health issues.

Over her life, Lorde collected a host of awards and honors, including the Walt Whitman Citation of Merit, which conferred the mantle of New York state poet for 1991–1993. More than a decade after her death, Lorde’s writings and speeches are still being used to inspire today’s activists.

LORDE

(1934 – 1992)

RESOURCES

RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Affirmation (Mormon)
P.O. Box 46022
Los Angeles, CA 90046-0022
323/255-7251
www.affirmation.org

Affirmation
(United Methodist)
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204
847/733-9590
www.umaffirm.org

Al-Fatiha Foundation
(Muslim)
P.O. Box 33532
Washington, D.C. 20033
202/319-0898
www.al-fatih.net

**Association of
Welcoming and
Affirming Baptists**
P.O. Box 2596
Attleboro Falls, MA
02763-0894
508/226-1945
www.wabaptists.org

**Brethren/Mennonite
Council for Lesbian and
Gay Concerns**
P.O. Box 6300
Minneapolis, MN 55406
612/722-6906
[www.webcom.com/bmcl
welcome.html](http://www.webcom.com/bmcl/welcome.html)

Dignity/USA (Catholic)
1500 Massachusetts Ave.,
Ste. 8, N.W.
Washington, DC 20005-1894
800/877-8797
www.dignityusa.org

Emergence International
(Christian Scientist)
P.O. Box 26237
Phoenix, AZ 85068
800/280-6653
www.emergence-international.org

**Evangelicals Concerned
with Reconciliation**
P.O. Box 19734
Seattle, WA 98109-6734
206/621-8960
www.ecwr.org

**Gay Buddhist
Fellowship**
2215-R Market St., PMB 456
San Francisco, CA 94114
415/974-9878
www.gaybuddhist.org

Integrity (Episcopalian)
1718 M St., N.W., PMB 148
Washington, DC 20036
202/462-9498
www.integrityusa.org

Lutherans Concerned
P.O. Box 10461
Chicago, IL 60610
www.lcna.org

More Light Presbyterians
4737 County Rd., 101
Minnetonka, MN 55345-2634
www.mlp.org

**Office of GLBT
Concerns for Unitarian
Universalists Association**
25 Beacon St.
Boston, MA 02108
617/948-6475
www.uua.org/obgltc/

Rainbow Baptists
P.O. Box 3183
Walnut Creek, CA 94598
www.rainbowbaptists.org

**Reconciling Pentecostals
International**
34522 N. Scottsdale Rd., D-8
Suite 238
Scottsdale, AZ 85262
480/595-5517
www.reconcilingpentecostals.com

**SDA Kinship
International**
(Seventh-Day Adventist)
P.O. Box 49375
Sarasota, FL 34250
866/732-5677
www.sdakinship.org

**United Fellowship of
Metropolitan
Community Churches**
8704 Santa Monica Blvd.,
2nd Fl.
West Hollywood, CA 90069
310/360-8640
www.ufmcc.com

**United Methodists of
Color for a Fully
Inclusive Church**
3801 N. Keeler Avenue
Chicago, IL 60641
773/736-5526
www.umoc.org

**Unity Fellowship Church
Movement**
(African American)
5148 West Jefferson Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90016
323/938-8322
www.unityfellowshipchurch.org

**World Congress of
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual
and Transgender Jews**
P.O. Box 23379
Washington, DC 20026-3379
202/452-7424
www.glbtejews.org

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

**African Ancestral
Lesbians United for
Social Change, Inc.**
154 Christopher St., #3-C
New York, NY 10014
212/741-9110, ext. 18
www.aalus.org

**American Veterans for
Equal Rights**
P.O. Box 97
Plainville, IL 62365-0097
www.aver.us

**Astraea Lesbian
Foundation for Justice**
116 East 16th St., 7th Fl.,
New York, NY 10003
212/529-8021
www.astraea.org

Bisexual Resource Center
P.O. Box 1026
Boston, MA 02117-1026
617/424-9595
www.biresource.org

**Gay and Lesbian Medical
Association**
459 Fulton St., Ste. 107
San Francisco, CA 94102
415/255-4547
www.glma.org

**Gay, Lesbian and
Straight Education
Network**
121 W. 27th St., Ste. 804
New York, NY 10001
212/727-0135
www.glsen.org

**Gender Education and
Advocacy**
P.O. Box 65
Kensington, MD 20895
301/949-3822 (#8)
www.gender.org

**Human Rights
Campaign**
1640 Rhode Island Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202/628-4160
TTY 202/216-1572
www.hrc.org

**International Foundation
for Gender Education**
P.O. Box 540229
Waltham, MA 02454-0229
781/899-2212
www.ifge.org

Lambda Legal
120 Wall St., Ste. 1500
New York, NY 10005-3904
212/809-8585
www.lambdalegal.org

Lesbian and Gay
Immigration Rights
Task Force
350 W. 31st St.,
Suite 505
New York, NY 10001
212/714-2904
www.lgirtf.org

National Association of
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
& Transgender
Community Centers
12832 Garden Grove, Blvd.
Ste. A
Garden Grove, CA 92843
www.lgbtcenters.org

National Black Justice
Coalition
P.O. Box 1229
New York, NY 10037
212/330-6599
www.nbjcoalition.org/

National Center for
Lesbian Rights
870 Market St., Ste. 570
San Francisco, CA 94102
415/392-6257
www.nclrights.org

National Gay and
Lesbian Task Force
1325 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.
Ste. 600
Washington, DC 20005
202/332-6483
TTY 202/332-6219
www.ngltf.org

LLEGÓ — National
Latina/o Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual & Transgender
Organization
1420 K St., N.W., Ste. 400
Washington, DC 20005
888/633-8320
www.llego.org

National Coming
Out Project
1640 Rhode Island Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
www.hrc.org/ncop

**National Minority AIDS
Council**
1931 13th St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20009
202/483-6622
www.nmac.org

**National Youth
Advocacy Coalition**
1638 R St., N.W., Ste. 300
Washington, DC 20009
800/541-6922
www.nyacyouth.org

**Parents, Families and
Friends of Lesbians and
Gays**
1726 M St., N.W., Ste. 400
Washington, DC 20036
202/467-8180
www.pflag.org

**Servicemembers Legal
Defense Network**
P.O. Box 65301
Washington, DC 20035-5301
202/328-3244
www.sldn.org

Youth Resource
200 M St., NW
Washington, DC 20036
202/419-3420
www.youthresource.com

Zuna Institute
4660 Natomas Blvd., 120-181
Sacramento, CA 95835
916/419-5075
www.zunainstitute.org

PRIDES

BLACK

Atlanta

www.inthelifeatl.com

Baltimore

www.bmoreblackpride.org

Birmingham

Boston

Charlotte

Chicago

www.windycitypride.org

Cleveland

Dallas

Detroit

www.hotterthanjuly.com

Houston

www.houstonplash.com

Jacksonville

www.jaxxblackpride.com/

Los Angeles

www.atbla.com

Minneapolis/St. Paul

www.minnesotasoulessence.com/

Nashville

*www.brothersunited.com/
blackpride.htm*

New Orleans

New York City

www.blackstripe.com

Oakland

*www.californiablackprides.org/
Events.html*

Philadelphia

www.geocities.com/phlblkpride

Pittsburgh

San Francisco

*www.californiablackprides.org/
Events.html*

St. Louis

Tampa

Washington, D.C.

www.dcblackpride.org

If no website is listed, none was available at printing.

WEBSITES

PUBLICATIONS &

African American Lesbians United
www.celebratesisterhood.org/index1.html

Blacklight
www.blacklightonline.com

Blackstripe
www.blackstripe.com

Black Homie Pages
www.blk.com

Chocolate City
www.chocolatecityusa.com

GLAAD Black History Month Kit
www.glaad.org/medial/resource_kit_detail.php?id=3048

NGLTF Black Pride
www.ngltf.org/pi/blackpride.htm

Operation: Rebirth
www.operationrebirth.com

Venus Magazine
www.venusmagazine.com

Women in the Life
www.womeninthelife.com

PFLAG RELATED

For Those We Love (Washington, D.C.) and African-American PFLAG chapters in Columbus, Ohio; Detroit; Seattle, Wash.; and Boston: contact *www.pflag.org* Families of Color Network (Listserv) at *focn@pflag.org*.

BOOKS

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

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

Black Like Us: A Century of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual African American Fiction. Devon W. Carbado. ed. et al, Cleis Press, 2002.

Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men. Essex Hemphill and Joe Beam, ed., Alyson Publications, 1991.

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

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

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

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

In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology. Joseph Beam, Alyson Publications, 1988.

Love Awaits, African American Women Talk About Sex, Love, and Life: Dearest Brothers, Much Peace, Your Sisters. Courtney Long and Maria Jones, eds., Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishers, 1995.

Love Lifted Me: In Spite Of The Church. K. Godfrey Easter, LLM
Publishing Group, 2002.

One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America. Keith Boykin,
Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1998.

One of the Children: Gay Black Men in Harlem. William Hawkswood,
University of California Press, 1996.

Respecting the Soul: Daily Reflections for Black Lesbians and Gays. Keith
Boykin, William Morrow & Co., 1999.

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

FILMS

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

Among Good Christian People. Catherine Gund and Jacqueline Woodson, 1980.

B.D. Women. Inge Blackman, 1994.

The Body of a Poet: A Tribute to Audre Lorde. Sonali Fernando, 1995.

Black Nations/Queer Nations? Shari Frilot, 1995.

Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin. Nancy Kates and Bennett Singer, 2002.

A Different Kind of BlackMan. Sheila J. Wise, 2001.

The Edge of Each Other's Battles: The Vision of Audre Lorde. Jennifer Abod, 2000.

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

He Left Me His Strength. DCTV, 1989.

I Shall Not Be Removed: The Life of Marlon Riggs. Karen Everett, 1996.

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

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

Tongues Untied. Marlon Riggs, 1989.

Watermelon Woman. Cheryl Dunye, 1997.

HOTLINES

The Trevor Hotline

866/4UTREVOR

866/488-7386

Gay and Lesbian National Hotline

888/843-GLNH (4564)

National AIDS Hotline

800/342-AIDS (2437)

800/344-7432 (Spanish)

800/243-7889 (TTY)

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL COMING OUT PROJECT?

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation's National Coming Out Project is an ongoing effort to promote honesty and openness about being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender on campus, in the workplace and in the community. It is an extension of National Coming Out Day, which was established after the 1987 gay and lesbian march on Washington, D.C. Celebrated every Oct. 11, National Coming Out Day is designed to educate America about the lives of GLBT people and celebrate the community's achievements.

The yearlong National Coming Out Project, led by Candace Gingrich, offers printed and web resources, facilitates public education and outreach programs that open a dialogue with GLBT and straight Americans and encourages GLBT Americans to come out and get involved. Visit the National Coming Out Project at www.hrc.org/ncop.

For more copies of the *Resource Guide to Coming Out for African Americans* or more information on the Human Rights Campaign Foundation and its National Coming Out Project, please contact us at 800/866-NCOD, ncop@hrc.org or 1640 Rhode Island Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

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