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**Queer Communities of Color Are  
Not Needed in White States  
to Win Marriage Rights  
Inclusion**

**By The Reverend Irene Monroe  
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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With Iowa being the fourth state to approve marriage equality, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer Americans' optimism is high, believing many more states will follow suit.

"We're hoping this momentum is contagious," Daniel Richards of Rhode Island told me. And should Rhode Island soon approve of same-sex marriage, it would be the fourth New England state to join Massachusetts, Connecticut, and now Vermont.

But with Rhode Island's Republican Governor, Donald Carcieri recently denouncing same-sex marriage, the battle for LGBTQ Rhode Islanders will be a hard one.

Rhode Island is the only state in New England that does not recognize same-sex marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships. And with a governor who supports the National Organization for Marriage, a nonprofit organization with a mission to protect heterosexual-only marriage and the faith communities that sustain it, I told Daniels his state's fight for marriage equality might be similar to California's Proposition 8 battle.

There are currently two bills in the Rhode Island legislature that would legalize same-sex marriage but Carcieri opposes both bills, stating, "What I don't want to see happen with this issue is what's happening in courts deciding things or legislatures deciding things. This is such an important issue I think it should be put to the voters." And if the governor has his wish, the right for LGBTQ Americans to marry will be a referendum on the 2010 ballot.

But Daniels told me that while Rhode Island's battle for marriage equality will be an arduous one, the fight will not be as difficult for queer Rhode Islanders because the state's communities of color are small and its faith communities of black ministers even smaller.

"Why would you need people who are not voting with you but against you? In Rhode Island we don't have to talk about them and don't have to talk to them. They're a liability," Daniels stated.

With the passing of Proposition 8 and blaming the African American community for its victory at the ballot box, the struggle for same-sex marriage showed us that it is a state-by-state battle, where the demographics of each state, indeed, comes into play.

Some strategists like Daniels, in the Marriage Equality Movement, have felt all along that communities of color - both straight and queer - have slowed the process, progress and momentum in this nationwide culture war. These activists have openly stated and showed in their community strategies and organizing that they don't want or need queer communities of color, especially in predominately white states, to win the battle.

And their reason is the following:

With enough successive wins from less heterogeneous LGBTQ and straight communities, like Iowa, Connecticut, Vermont, and, yes, even my state of, Massachusetts, these judicial endorsements of same-sex marriages not only increase public acceptance of LGBTQ nuptials, but these endorsements can conceivably push more quickly the issue of marriage equality to the federal level for LGBTQ Americans, all the way to the U. S. Supreme Court, circumventing our internal wars of class, race, and homophobic faith communities entirely.

"There has been a shift of about 10 percentage points in the past five years in public support for same-sex marriage. On a deep moral issue like this, that's very rare," Nathaniel Persily, who teaches law and political science at Columbia University and has tracked public opinion about gay rights after several court decisions, stated to the Associated Press.

The truth of the matter concerning Proposition 8 is that the blaming of its passing ought not be placed on shoulders of African Americans, who comprise just 6.2 percent of the state's overall population. But this fact plays small in understanding that our government is the culprit here by legally framing a minority group's civil rights as a ballot question.

So where do we go from here, without killing each other?

First, our state-by-state battle for marriage equality cannot be framed as a single-issue agenda addressing the concerns and values of an elite few, regardless of the size of its LGBTQ communities of color.

Second, communities of color cannot be deployed in this battle in a used-when-needed basis, like for the movement's photo-op moments.

Third, inviting communities of color in the decision making and statewide strategies makes for an inclusive movement.

But not all marriage equality activists from predominately white states feel the marriage equality battle can be successfully won without the input and inclusion of their communities of color.

"If people want equality it takes a lot of people to win. It takes everyone not just one community of people advocating the rights for a few versus advocating the rights for us all, " stated my masseuse Dale Wingate of Maine.


If Marriage Equality pushed white states first as its game plan to avoid communities of color, as Daniels suggests, it would not only be continuing to push forward a single-issue agenda, but it would also be ignoring vital ways for coalition-building across diverse communities and honorable ways of connecting the struggle for marriage equality of LGBTQ citizens to the wider cause for justice.


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**BlackCommentator.com** Editorial Board member, the Rev. Irene Monroe, is a religion columnist, theologian, and public speaker. A native of Brooklyn, Rev. Monroe is a graduate from Wellesley College and Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University, and served as a pastor at an African-American church before coming to Harvard Divinity School for her doctorate as a Ford Fellow. Reverend Monroe is the author of [Let Your Light Shine Like a Rainbow Always: Meditations on Bible Prayers for Not-So-Everyday Moments](#) . As an African American feminist theologian, she speaks for a sector of society that is frequently invisible. Her website is [irenemonroe.com](http://irenemonroe.com). Click [here](#) to contact the Rev. Monroe.

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