

# **The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r**

An independent weekly internet magazine —  
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,  
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,  
analysis and investigations on issues affecting  
African Americans and the African world.

[www.BlackCommentator.com](http://www.BlackCommentator.com)

**July 12, 2012 - Issue 480**

## **R&B Star Frank Ocean Comes Out and Exemplifies the Community's Rejection of a "Gay Identity"**

### **Inclusion**

**By The Reverend Irene Monroe  
BC Editorial Board**

R&B and Hip-Hop songwriter, Frank Ocean, has come out. Although it will be hotly contested in African American circles, some say Ocean is the first major artist to come out in both industries. For some time there have been rumors about Ocean's down-low trysts. But in Ocean's new album, *Channel Orange*, to be released July 17, a journalist attending the listening party for the album noted that several of the songs were not heterosexual in messaging but rather they were boldly "addressed to a male love object."

"When I think about the term 'running away,' probably it's not the right one," Ocean told *New York Times* reporter, Jon Caramanica. "It's more I decided to do something different, so that I might have a different outlook." Ocean added, "When they're emotional things, you can't run away from them anyway."

One of the things from which Ocean has now stopped running away, when publicly confronted, is his sexuality. The 24-year-old New Orleans native posted last week on both Twitter and Tumblr that he had had a same-gender loving relationship when he was 19.

"4 summers ago, I met somebody. I was 19. He was too. We spent that summer, and the summer after, together. Everyday almost. And on the days we were together, time would glide... Sleep I would often share with him... There was no escaping. No negotiating with the feeling. No choice. It was my first love."

Ocean concludes the post: "I don't have any secrets I need to keep anymore... I feel like a free man..."

While homophobia is evident in Hip-Hop, so, too it is, in R&B. As a rising star in both genres, Ocean's not stating whether he is "bisexual" or "gay" has frustrated many in the LGBTQ community, but it might speak to his need to stay afloat professionally.

At [Ebony.com](http://Ebony.com), Jamilah Lemieux noted that while few urban artists openly embrace homosexuality, many are in "the closet with the glass door," living a life they don't reveal in their music. "I hope that Frank Ocean doesn't become 'the gay singer,' for it would be criminally unfair for him to wear that label as so many of his peers are sleeping with and loving same gendered persons, while selling images of hyper-heterosexuality."

But that "LGBTQ" label is what many African American artists have doggedly denounced in spite of being caught in an indisputable same-gender lover's embrace.

Let's not forget our down-to-earth Jersey girl, Dana Owens, a.k.a reigning Hip-hop's Queen Latifah.

The African American celebrity gossip, news, popular culture and entertainment blog [Bossip.com](http://Bossip.com) outed Latifah in September 2010 with photos of Latifah and gal pal and "personal trainer" Jeanette Jenkins in a tender embrace that was not intended for public viewing. When R&B soul diva Alicia Keys' photos from the nuptials of Queen Latifah and Jenkins intimately embraced aboard a private yacht in France went viral on the Internet, the public's long awaited "Gotcha" moment was revealed.

"My private life is my private life. Whomever I might be with, I don't feel the need to share it. I don't think I ever will," Queen Latifah had said in a November, 2007 interview with *People* magazine, refuting rumors that she's a lesbian.

Ann Powers in her article, *A Close Look At Frank Ocean's Coming Out Letter*, for NPR opines differently as to why artists might not self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ):

"There is another reason why Ocean can't be saddled with an easy label, and it points to an interesting aspect of his newly

minted self-conception. In his note, instead of embracing an identity, Ocean shared a set of memories and explored complex feelings, just as he does in his songs. Unlike the standard coming out gesture - newsman Anderson Cooper's public email to his friend Andrew Sullivan, "The fact is, I'm gay" - Ocean's presented sexuality as something that arises within particular circumstances, defined by shifting desire and individual encounters rather than solidifying as an identity. In the age-old debate about whether sexuality emerges as something we are or through something we want or do, Ocean carefully rested on the side of feeling and deed."

Although Ocean appears "label-less" in not identifying as either "bisexual" or "gay," Cleo Manago, founder of Black Men's Xchange (BMX), states in this article, *Can People Let Frank Ocean Define His Own Sexuality*, a possible reason why:

"What we've witnessed is a profound chauvinism on the part of gay-identified individuals who cannot conceive of any identity outside of the limiting gay/straight binary. And in the process, they continue to obscure the rarely acknowledged reality that many Black men who love men are not comfortable with the LGBT or gay identity."

The terms "LGBT," "queer" and "gay" are not descriptors Manago and his organization would use to depict themselves. They would be "same-gender-loving" because terms like "gay" and "queer" uphold a white queer hegemony that Manago and many in the African-American LGBTQ community denounce. As a matter-of-fact, he is credited with coining the terms "men who have sex with men" (MSM) and "same-gender-loving" (SGL)

With a president who now embraces same-sex marriage and in this era of celebrated LGBTQ artists like Ellen DeGeneres and Wanda Sykes, the fluidity of sexuality is becoming more accepted, even in certain artist enclaves of the African American community.

When Ocean made public his announcement, power couple Beyonce and Jay-Z expressed their support. And Russell Simmons, co-founder of the hip-hop label "Def Jam" wrote a congratulatory article, *The Courage of Frank Ocean Just Changed the Game!* in *Global Grind* stating, "Today is a big day for hip-hop. It is a day that will define who we really are. How compassionate will we be? How loving can we be? How inclusive are we? ... Your decision to go public about your sexual

orientation gives hope and light to so many young people still living in fear."

Ocean has certainly changed the game for both hip-hop and R&B LGBTQ artists, but he sums up this issue best when he posted on his Tumblr page, "My hope is that the babies born these days will inherit less of the (expletive) than we did."

**BlackCommentator.com** Editorial Board member and Columnist, the Rev. Irene Monroe, is a religion columnist, theologian, and public speaker. She is the Coordinator of the African-American Roundtable of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry (CLGS) at the Pacific School of Religion. 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. She was recently named to MSNBC's list of [10 Black Women You Should Know](#). 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.



Copyright © 2002-2012  
[www.BlackCommentator.com](http://www.BlackCommentator.com)  
All Rights Reserved