

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.

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Nov 9, 2012 - Issue 493

Big Wins on Marriage Equality for LGBTQ Inclusion

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

Election results brought big wins for LGBTQ Americans.

And Americans' acceptance of marriage equality showed its approval, of all places, at the ballot box. Both Maryland and Maine are the first states in which voters decided to legalize same-sex marriage.

While many will still contest, and rightly so, that to frame our civil rights as a ballot question for a popular vote is both wrong-hearted and wrong-headed, the results this time around were not disastrous, as it was with California's Proposition 8. And for a state like Maryland, that has a huge religiously conservative African American population coming out to cast their votes for Obama, the legalization of marriage equality, albeit by a razor-thin victory, is an Herculean feat.

But as can be expected, many African Americans voters, as one conservative voting bloc, overwhelmingly disapproved. According to the *Associated Press*, exit polls conducted on Election Day revealed that while 9 out of 10 African American voters pulled their levers for Obama, approximately half of these voters pulled their levers in opposition to same-sex marriage.

In March, Maryland's marriage equality was signed into law, but with an avalanche of opposition and a "people's veto" with enough signatures to back it up, the issue was forced onto the ballot.

Question One on Maine's ballot was to overturn its 2009 voter-approved ban on marriage equality. And it won. Maine is known for its

moderate, independent-minded electorate, but in 2009, 53 percent of Mainers, mostly conservative, voted down same-sex marriage.

According to Public Policy Polling, in March 2011, 45 percent of Mainers approved of same-sex marriage, whereas 57 percent approved it this year, resulting in this Election Day victory.

And Maine owes some of its victory to the indefatigable work of Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD).

"We started this work together 6 years ago, and our commitment has never wavered. We faced a setback in 2009 when voters overturned the first state marriage equality law to be passed by a legislature and signed by a governor - but we didn't give up," Lee Swislow, Executive Director, wrote in an email blast. "Today, all the conversations we've had with Mainers - about love, commitment, family, and marriage - have paid off. Now, loving couples - whether together for months or decades - can finally make that commitment of marriage to one another."

Maine is now the fifth New England state that endorses marriage equality.

Also, Minnesota made history at the ballot box by being the second state to beat back any attempt of a proposed constitutional amendment to define marriage as between one man and one woman. Exit polls revealed that four in five born-again or evangelical Christians favored the amendment. A gender and generational divide revealed that an overwhelming number of women and voters under 50 disapproved of the amendment. And not surprisingly, the divide was also a blue-red state split where 75 percent of Democrats were against the ballot initiative and 75 percent of Republicans were for it.

In expressing his elation of Minnesotans voting down the constitutional amendment, Brent Childers of Faith in America wrote an email blast to his supporter stating the following:

"Just sharing a big congratulation to all those in Minnesota who worked very hard to defeat an anti-gay marriage amendment last night. According to reports this morning, the final tally is not in but the anti-gay forces are not going to get a required margin of victory - if any margin of victory at all - to pass the amendment. As the first state to defeat a constitutional ban

through a popular vote, it is truly a historic achievement for Minnesota supporters of full equality.”

In 2003, former Governor Mitt Romney told the *Boston Globe* that his reason for opposing same-sex marriage was “3,000 years of recorded history” on his side. In 2012, it was obvious his views haven’t changed.

While this statement makes a great rhetorical sound bite and gets homophobes all riled up, it dangerously promulgates hatred and opposes human progress toward justice and inclusion that has taken place over the centuries. And it is just one reason why an overwhelming number of women, LGBTQ and Americans of color did not cast their vote for him.

Too often, I have found that the right choice and the moral high ground on an issue derive from struggling groups trying both to be seen and heard among the cacophony of dissenting voices and opposing votes. It is with these groups that democracy can begin to work, where those relegated to the fringes of society can begin to sample what those in society take for granted as their inalienable right.

Marriage is an inalienable right, one that ought to be afforded to all and one that ought to be non negotiable. But this issue of who has the right to marry whom has become the prism through which heterosexism and homophobia refract and reflect light on the church, the state, and this election.

Democracy can only begin when people, like those in Maine, Maryland and Minnesota, step in to make the democratic process work for us all.

It’s a lesson I hope Romney learns.

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. Click [here](#) to contact the Rev. Monroe.*



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