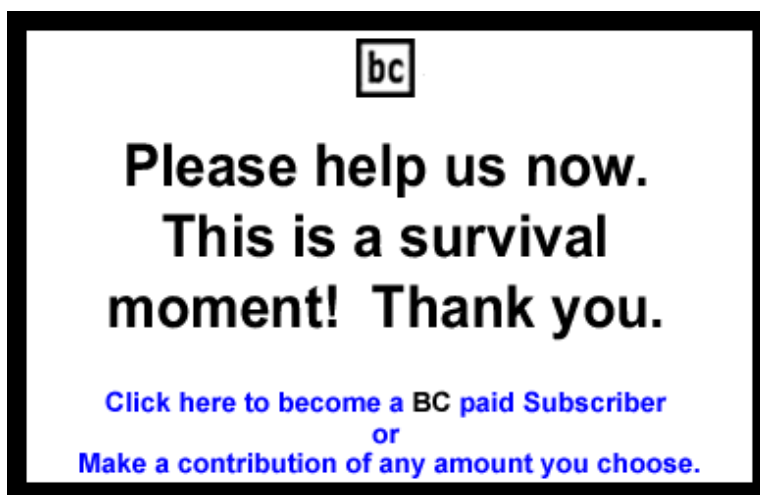


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**Black Media Fails Its LGBTQ Community
Inclusion
By The Reverend Irene Monroe
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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By now many in the LGBTQ community have heard of the news about the cop beat down of Duanna Johnson in a Memphis jailhouse that was captured on a surveillance video. Those of us especially of African descent, who don't know or haven't seen a photo of Johnson, might pick up on a cultural marker - her name, assuming correctly she's an African American sister.

While police brutality is both unbridled and rampant in the African American community, hitting an African American woman several times with handcuffs wrapped around the officer's knuckles, and an African American nurse goes directly to the offending white officer to see if he's okay is another cultural marker - Johnson's a transwoman.

"While I applaud you [NAACP] for declaring a state of emergency over the treatment of African-Americans by the police, I have yet to hear any NAACP local, state or the national chapter speak up not only about this case, but about the verbal and physical hate attacks on African-American transpeople in general. As Duanna Johnson's case graphically points out, some of the problems we transpeople of African descent face

are at the hands of the people who are supposed to protect and serve us," wrote Monica Roberts in her blog "Yo NAACP, NBJC...Where Y'all At?" on the Bilerco Project website. Roberts is also the founder of the African American transpeople online group Transsistahs - Transbrothas.

But the appalling silence Roberts experienced from major African American organizations in this country that vow to protect and serve its community was also experienced from black media.

The Duanna Johnson story will neither be featured in Jet, Ebony nor Essence.

And although I am thankful that the gay news media have captured the details surrounding Johnson's arrest the real story has not been told. And that story is how the intersection of racism and trans phobia unleashes its rage on the body of black transgenders, triggering the type of violence Duanna Johnson experienced. It is this type of violence that is endemic in the black community, which is why black media should have reported.

Very little is understood about transgender people because they are relegated to the fringes of society. Crimes against transgender people often go unnoticed or are seen as lesser crimes. And the fact that Johnson walked away with her life she's lucky, because transgender people are often subjected to extreme violence that often results in murder.

For example, in 1998 Rita Hester, a 34-year-old African American transsexual was murdered. Ms. Hester was a male to female pre-op transsexual woman who was mysteriously found dead inside her first floor apartment in Allston, just outside of Boston, with multiple stab wounds to her chest.

But the other crime committed in the Hester case back then was the media coverage. While black media did not cover the case the Boston Herald did, depicting Ms. Hester as he, or a transvestite, or William, or an enigma stating that even her neighbors didn't know who she was until the time of her death. This type of news coverage was not only damaging, disrespectful and demeaning to the entire transgender community but it also keeps transgender people constantly subjected to ridicule, confusion, ignorance, and ostensibly hate crimes.

Johnson explained that the officer's attack on her was because she refused to respond to the derogatory names he called her.

"Actually he was trying to get me to come over to where he was, and I responded by telling him that wasn't my name - that my mother didn't name me a 'faggot' or a 'he-she,' so he got upset and approached me. And that's when it started.

Calling a trans person out of his or her name is unfortunately a daily indignity most face. Racism adds another indignity.

"A white person who transitions to a male body just became a man. I became a Black man. I became the enemy," London Dexter Ward, an LAPD cop who transitioned in 2004, told AlterNet.org.

And it wasn't until Louis Mitchell becoming a black man that he learned that "driving while black" would be such an offense. Mitchell, who resides in Springfield, MA, told ColorLines that he gets pulled over "300 percent more now than in his 23 years of

driving.”

Issues of race, gender expression, and sexual orientation trigger a particular type of violence against all people of color that black media cannot afford to go unreported. Not reporting what is going on its LGBTQ community not only subjects us to constant violence that goes unchecked, but it also puts the larger African American community at risk.

But the lack of reporting on these types of hate crimes in black media are for three reasons - all dealing with homophobia and trans phobia.

The first reason is the “politics of silence.” Black media will not report hate crimes against its LGBTQ community even if it results in death due to both homo and trans phobias. But, most often so too, won’t its LGBTQ community, but for a different reason - internalizing the black community’s homo and trans phobias. With being openly queer and often estranged if not alienated from our communities of color, reporting attacks against us by other people of color in our communities as well as by the police can make victims be viewed as race traitors. So we end up colluding in the violence against us.

The second reason has to do with the dearth of openly LGBTQ reporters in black media writing on queer topics. This month for the first time in the history of the Bay State Banner, an African American newspaper in Greater Boston, it wrote an article on black queer culture titled “Pride, Family values shine in Hub’s gay black culture.” Why now? Because Katherine Patrick, the daughter of our governor, Deval Patrick, who’s the second African American to be elected governor in the U.S., came out. The media attention surrounding her coming out finally underscored the fact that we have always been a part of the black community.

The third reason is the “politics of avoidance.” Black media won’t broach the topic of hate crimes against its LGBTQ population for fear it would be one more reason for white media to view violence as being synonymous with people of color.

However, the end result of this kind of homo and trans phobias in black media is that it not only re-victimizes those of us targeted by these type of hate crimes, but it also puts the entire community at risk by leaving out news that ought to be left in.

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 the soon-to-be-released [Let Your Light Shine Like a Rainbow Always: Meditations on Bible Prayers for Not-So-Everyday Moments](#). Click on the above link to order now at pre-release pricing. 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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