

# 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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## **A Month to Begin Anti-Bullying Inclusion By The Reverend Irene Monroe BC Editorial Board**

October is National Anti-Bullying Awareness Month. With one incident of bullying every seven minutes, sadly, bullying is the most frequent form of violence school-aged children encounter.

In the 2011 documentary film, *Bully*, film director, Lee Hirsch, also the victim of bullying, gives us a window into the lives of five school-aged children - from across ethnic, cultural and geographic boundaries - who confront bullying on a daily basis. Their stories are unimaginably painful.

Their stories are just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. The statistics on bullying is staggering.

According to [BullyingStatistics.org](http://BullyingStatistics.org), approximately 42 percent of school-aged children have been bullied while online with 35 percent being the victim of threats. Approximately 58 percent of have reported that something mean has been said about them or to them online.

It is estimated that 160,000 children miss school everyday because of the fear of assault or intimidation by other students.

Statistics also reveal 77 percent of students have been the victim of some type of bullying with 46 percent of males and 26 percent of females being the victims of physical fights. Homophobic bullying targets our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer students, or those perceived to be LGBTQ.

Case in point: Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover.

When Sirdeaner L. Walker of Springfield spoke at a press conference in Massachusetts in 2009, calling for effective and comprehensive anti-bullying legislation to be passed in response to the tragic loss of her 11-year-old-son, Carl, I had hoped I would neither read nor hear ever again about another child or young adult committing suicide as the result of homophobic bullying. Again, and sadly, it was just the tip. "Bullicide" was on its way to becoming a national epidemic. Just in the month of September 2010, nine teen suicides were tied to sexual orientation or gender expression. This highlighted the disproportionate bullying of our LGBTQ kids (or those perceived to be).

One of the suicides that September was that of 18-year-old Rutgers University freshman, Tyler Clementi. Clementi jumped to his death from the George Washington Bridge after finding out that his college roommate and another classmate used a webcam to secretly broadcast his sexual encounters with another male, highlighting the dangers of "cyberbullying" - teasing, harassing, or intimidating with pictures or words distributed online or via text message.

Clementi's suicide, along with the other eight, went viral and they saturated the media. Those of us in the African American community, however, were not surprised that Joseph Jefferson's suicide, just two months later that November, went unnoticed. 26-year-old African American gay youth activist, Joseph Jefferson, took his own life; he worked with HIV/AIDS charities and was an assistant to promoters of Black LGBTQ events in NYC.

"I could not bear the burden of living as a gay man of color in a world grown cold and hateful towards those of us who live and love differently than the so-called 'social mainstream,'" Jefferson posted on his Facebook page the day he killed himself.

African American LGBTQ residing in the black communities are frequently the subjects of bullying, which often times leads to their death by suicide or gang violence. For example, in 2006, Michael Sandy was killed after being hit by a car while he was trying to escape attackers in Brooklyn on Plumb Beach. Sandy and a man arranged to meet after their exchange in an online gay chat room. When Sandy arrived, he was confronted by four men who robbed him and chased him onto the highway. Sandy was then hit by an oncoming vehicle and died from brain injuries.

Ms. Walker found her son, Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover, hanging by an extension cord on the second floor of their home after he endured endless anti-gay and homophobic taunts by schoolmates, although Carl never identified as gay.

And with homophobia being what it is in the African American community, I imagined Carl, an African-American, must have experienced an endless cycle of bullying.

The harm from bullying and the toll it takes - not only on our kids but also the society at large - is far greater than people realize. At the press conference, Ms. Walker highlighted those concerns:

“In the immortal words of U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, ‘It is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education.’ Bias, bullying, and harassment currently stand between too many youth and this essential opportunity.”

Walker is right. Anti-gay bullying truncates a child’s academic ability to excel. And the cost, while immediately about the child, is an equally greater cost to us as a society down the road. Anti-gay bullying is not to be endured or tolerated. It must be stopped by us all - and at all levels, from our legislators to our educators.

In 2010, Governor Patrick signed a strong anti-bullying legislation cementing the state’s commitment to changing the culture of bullying in schools, and Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (GLAD) was involved in the drafting and legislative process from beginning to end. Victims of bullying endure a host of emotional problems. They become anxious, insecure, and suffer low self-esteem because the targeting of them has made them feel isolated, helpless, and vulnerable. Those feelings are just merely some of what we can surmise Carl and Tyler experienced.

Countless others, unfortunately, will experience those same feelings during this school year.

***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.*



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