Recommendations drawn from *Public Opinion and Discourse on the Intersection of LGBT Issues and Race*

Introduction

A growing number of advocacy organizations today are working at the intersection of racial justice, sexual orientation, and gender identity, confronting the myths and biases that continue to hamper the rights and opportunities of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community, people of color and, especially, LGBT people of color. Americans are more open to issues of LGBT equality than at any time in our history: nineteen percent of Americans report that in the last five years they have become "more supportive" of rights for gay and lesbian people, while only six percent say they have become "more opposed."[1]

Some segments of the population, however, including those who can usually be counted upon to support the rights of victims of discrimination, continue to harbor reservations about granting lesbians and gay men full equality, particularly when it comes to marriage equality. Anti-LGBT biases, including within the African-American and Latino communities, have created divisions and stymied collaborative activism and advocacy. The human cost of these disconnects is high. LGBT people of color experience marginalization from the mainstream as a result of both their race and their sexual identity, and compounding marginalization from within their own communities. The result is a "double-outsider" status in which individuals are systematically separated from even what little opportunity might exist within their own marginalized community.

Creating a more responsive and supportive media environment — one that conveys the movement's values, concerns, and solutions, and accurately portrays LGBT people of color — is vitally important in breaking down the barriers that keep people apart and prevent communities of color from wholeheartedly embracing the movement's goals. Media representations of people and issues have important effects. Research shows that depiction in the media, especially distorted portrayals, affects public perceptions, which ultimately have a real impact on people's lives every time their fate depends on how they are perceived by others.[2,3]

Recent research undertaken by the Arcus Foundation indicates that there are powerful openings for building support for LGBT rights within the African-American community: focusing on issues of discrimination, tapping themes of community and family, and characterizing the struggle for LGBT rights as a struggle for equal rights rather than civil rights. The Opportunity Agenda's report *Public Opinion and Discourse on the Intersection of LGBT Issues and Race*, made possible by funding from the Arcus Foundation, takes a close look at current public opinion and the role of ethnic and new media in both perpetuating and challenging myths and biases about LGBT people.

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1 Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2011 March Political Typology, February 22-March 14, 2011.
2 Dong, Q., & Murrillo, A.P. (2007). The Impact of Television Viewing on Young Adults' Stereotypes Towards Hispanic Americans. *Human Communication*, 10 (1), 33-44.
3 Entman, R.M., & Gross, K.A. (2008). Race to Judgment: Stereotyping Media and Criminal Defendants. *Law and Contemporary Problems*, 71 (93), 94-133.

In this document we make a series of recommendations about how to improve the ethnic and new media environments in the three genres examined by *Public Opinion and Discourse on the Intersection of LGBT Issues and Race*: 1) African-American news media, 2) Latino news media, and 3) commonly used social media platforms such as blogs, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Our hope is that the report and these recommendations will contribute significantly to the vital work of organizations that work at the intersection of LGBT and race in their struggle to overcome the "double-outsider" status experienced by their constituents.

These recommendations at times use different terms to describe the same racial categories in an attempt to be consistent with the terminology used in each study that is cited, when applicable. The public opinion research component of the report uses the racial categories utilized by the federal government, which have been largely adopted by opinion research. The categories are defined as follows:

▶ White: any person who self-identifies as white only and non-Hispanic

▶ Black: any person who self-identifies as black only

▶ Hispanic: any person of any race who self-identifies as Hispanic

▶ Asian: any person who self-identifies as Asian only

This report also uses the terms "homosexual" and "homosexuality" when those terms are used by public opinion researchers and in the media we analyzed.

I. Recommendations regarding African-American print and online news media

▶ **Make LGBT rights and issues more visible:** Coverage in the African-American print and online news media is uneven, but some outlets have demonstrated an interest in covering LGBT people and issues. Ramp up outreach to journalists who already cover LGBT issues, like Jasmine Cannick of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* (who also has her own YouTube channel), James Wright of the *Washington Informer*, and Boyce Watkins for *Black Voices*. Engage them in discussion and encourage them to take on some of the barriers that prevent many African Americans from supporting LGBT rights, e.g., the perceived role of "down low" men in spreading HIV/AIDS and the belief that being gay is a "lifestyle choice." Encourage veteran journalist George E. Curry, whose columns are syndicated and picked up by community newspapers nationwide, to expand his coverage to topics the movement has prioritized. An increase in favorable coverage in a few influential outlets will lead to more frequent and thoughtful coverage in others.

    ✓ The magazines in our scan, *Essence*, *Jet*, *Ebony*, *Crisis*, and *Black Enterprise*, have a combined paid circulation of 5 million readers and a very large pass-along rate.[4] They are consumed in beauty salons, barbershops, and doctors' offices by millions of people. With only a few notable exceptions, the magazines we looked at have largely ignored LGBT issues, rights, and people, particularly in their print versions. Improving African-American magazine coverage should be a priority for LGBT advocates. Advocates should consider setting up meetings with editorial staff and pitching stories to sympathetic staff and freelance journalists who understand the issues.

▶ **Pitch stories that depict the "every day" aspect of the African-American LGBT experience:** Opinion research has identified two groups that have the standing in the African-American community to carry on a unique dialogue with other African Americans on LGBT issues, and one of those

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4   Combined paid circulation refers to the sum of newsstand sales and subscriptions to a publication. The figure of 5 million readers is from "African-American/Black Market Profile," Magazine Publishers of America (MPA), May 2008. Pass-along rate refers to the number of readers who pass the magazine on to others.

groups is LGBT African Americans.[5] The more readers see and hear about strong LGBT-led families, positive coming-out stories, and LGBT African Americans who are civic leaders, business owners, community activists and educators, the better. Stories about local businesses, civic leaders and activities, births, deaths, and weddings — "the stuff of everyday life" — are the staples of African-American newspapers. African-American magazines like *Essence* and *Ebony* have regular departments devoted to relationships, health, and family issues. The cumulative effect of higher visibility through feature stories, photographs, and news reports will be greater acceptance and inclusion and the gradual erosion of the double-outsider status now experienced by LGBT African Americans, i.e., their marginalization from mainstream society compounded by marginalization from within their own communities.

▶ **Pitch systemic stories about discrimination, bullying, and hate crimes:** African Americans are acutely sensitive to hate crimes of any kind. A recent survey showed that 80 percent of African Americans support giving "gays and lesbians legal protection against hate crimes, the same as hate crime laws that protect racial minorities." Focus groups research with African-American audiences, which tested sample direct-mail pieces for a fictitious "Treat Everyone Fairly" campaign, found that the most persuasive piece was titled "This Young Man was Attacked for Being Gay" and depicted an African-American man in a hospital bed, head swathed in bandages. The message "Hate Crimes and Bullying Happen Everyday" was superimposed on the photograph. Our media scan showed that a full half of all the stories on African-American online news sites were about homophobia, discrimination, or bullying. African-American newspapers also cover incidents of homophobic violence. African-American media are receptive to such stories, but it is important that they be told thematically to emphasize that individual cases of homophobic violence are part of a much larger societal problem.

▶ **Hone and disseminate messages that lead with values:** A large body of research shows that starting conversations with shared values instead of dry facts or argumentative rhetoric is more effective in building support for a cause. Here we have the benefit of opinion research which shows that African Americans are clear that LGBT people are victims of discrimination and that therefore, "'Discrimination' is unifying language for African Americans and the LGBT movement":

> "Unlike white audiences, fighting discrimination is hardwired for African Americans and immediately gets their attention. The survey results clearly indicate that African Americans believe LGBT people, even more so than other groups, face real problems with discrimination. This is a huge advantage in bringing African Americans along in their support for fairness and equality for LGBT citizens."

▶ **Enlist more leaders from the African-American civil rights movement as spokespeople:** Another group of credible messengers identified by opinion research is civil rights leaders. We found a number of pro-LGBT commentaries by civil rights leaders in our scan, including, for example, Marc Morial (The National Urban League), Ben Jealous and Julian Bond (NAACP), and Rev. Eric Lee (Southern Christian Leadership Conference). They should receive regular updates about breaking news and developments and given support for their outspokenness and leadership. More African-American civil rights leaders, especially women and members of the faith community, should be identified and enlisted to write and speak on the subject. Online news sites like *The Root*, *The Grio*, and *Black Voices* are ideal venues for serious discussion and debate about why African Americans should actively support LGBT equality.

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5   Unless otherwise noted, all references to opinion research on African Americans and LGBT issues are from Donna Victoria and Cornell Belcher for the Arcus Operating Foundation, "LGBT Rights and Advocacy: Messaging to African American Communities," December 2009.

▶ **Use "equal rights" rather than "civil rights" when advocating for the rights of LGBT people among African-American audiences,** as the use of the latter term can create a backlash. Public opinion research shows that African Americans do not equate the struggle for LGBT rights with their own struggle for civil rights. When given a choice of terms to describe "the struggle facing gays and lesbians" around hate crimes, housing and job discrimination, and bullying, a majority of 55 percent chose "equal rights" as the best term.

▶ **Consider whether it furthers your agenda to pitch stories that discuss homosexuality as "something a person is born with"** to increase support for that belief among African Americans. Research shows that views on whether homosexuality is due to "upbringing" or "choice" are strongly correlated with opposition to expanding LGBT rights, whereas views that it is "something a person is born with" correlate with support for such rights. Sixty-five percent of those who think people are "born gay" support marriage equality, compared to 15 percent among those who say "being gay is a personal choice."[6] African Americans are more likely (47 percent) than some other groups to think that "being gay is a choice."[7]

II. Recommendations regarding Latino print and online news media

▶ **Amplify the voices and visible participation of LGBT Latinos as leaders and spokespeople in Latino media.** Latinos in general and LGBT Latinos in particular perceive the LGBT rights movement as largely white and not inclusive of their community. As columnist Rey Torres wrote, "The rights of gay Latinos are not being addressed within the white gay community in a manner that shows equality and fairness. Traditional gay rights organizations are not meeting the specific needs of the Latino community."[8] This perception can be overcome if LGBT Latinos are proactive in pitching stories and writing commentary about their priority issues.

▶ **Capitalize on the connection Latino media are already making between LGBT rights and immigrant rights.** In its publication *Talking About LGBT Equality with Latinos & Hispanics*,[9] GLAAD explains that:

> While immigration reform and the movement for LGBT equality both involve advocacy against discrimination, Latinos tend to reject attempts to compare experiences of immigrants with other forms of discrimination. Latino immigrants routinely face deportation fears, racial profiling, workplace raids and more. These hardships differ from the discrimination suffered by LGBT people who are not immigrants, not in terms of being "greater" or "lesser" hardships, but simply in terms of being unique. Attempts to compare such experiences generally lead Latinos and non-Latino allies to focus on what they might see as differences between Latinos and LGBT people, rather than on our common ground. Instead, consider focusing on a sense of shared struggle against common opponents who are both anti-immigrant and anti-LGBT — though without comparing struggles or hardships faced.

Carefully demonstrating the parallels between LGBT rights and immigrant rights can reinforce the idea that LGBT rights are also a human rights issue. Examples from this media scan include articles that linked anti-LGBT hate crimes to anti-Latino hate crimes, a column that compared the army's treatment of gay soldiers to the country's treatment of the undocumented, and an article that shed light on the experiences of LGBT Latinos in immigration detention. Highlighting existing collaborations and coalitions across the two movements may also be productive.

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6   Quinnipiac University Poll, April 21-27, 2009.
7   Pew Research Center, August-September 2010.
8   Rey Torres, "Gay Latinos: A Minority Within a Minority," *Adelante*, Oct. 1, 2009.
9   http://www.glaad.org/publications/talkingabout/lgbthispanics.

▶ **Integrate LGBT voices into subject areas that are not traditional LGBT issues.** One of the major holes in Latino media coverage of LGBT issues is that the voices of identifiable LGBT individuals were relegated to stories about "gay issues." The more they are integrated into stories in other news beats, the more they will be viewed as integral members of the community. Find LGBT angles on topics such as immigration, health, and education and expand the roster of LGBT spokespeople who can be quoted in other news beats.

▶ **Pitch human interest stories about LGBT people and couples and strong LGBT-led families.** Opponents of LGBT rights portray LGBT people as outsiders who present a threat to children, families, and communities. The best way to disprove this stereotype is to present LGBT Latinos as insiders who are integral parts of families and communities. Make sure that human interest stories are told in the context of larger systemic problems and solutions.

▶ **Develop messages that lead with values of human rights or equal rights.** In 2007, The Opportunity Agenda commissioned a national survey to probe attitudes towards human rights in the United States. Respondents were asked if they thought "equal opportunities for gays and lesbians should be considered a human right that should be protected." Latinos were significantly more likely to answer in the affirmative than whites or African Americans (68 percent of Latinos, compared to 55 percent of whites and 61 percent of African Americans).[10] A majority of Latinos believe that marriage inequality is a form of discrimination (57 percent said it was, compared to 45 percent of whites and 45 percent of African Americans).[11] Advocates will be on solid ground with Latino audiences if they lead with the values of human rights or equal rights.

▶ **Add clergy and faith leaders to the roster of pro-LGBT rights spokespeople.** Members of the clergy are the most common spokespeople quoted in opposition to marriage equality, and their core message is that marriage equality goes against the will of God. It is essential to identify and activate Latino religious leaders who can articulate a faith-based, pro-LGBT message. The difference between civil and religious marriage ceremonies should be embedded in the message to avoid the confusion that existed during California's Proposition 8 debate when supporters of the proposition claimed that marriage equality would be imposed on the church.

III. Recommendations regarding online discourse about LGBT issues in African-American and Latino communities

Each of the social media platforms is unique and offers its own opportunities for advocacy. Blogs allow for commentary and the exploration of different points of view. Facebook provides the tools for community-building and mobilization. Twitter allows for comments on events as they unfold and directs followers' attention to articles and web-based actions. And YouTube provides a platform for the visual impact of personal stories and strong advocacy.

Blogs

▶ **Actively engage with popular blogs** that cover LGBT issues and demonstrate an interest in the intersection of racial justice, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Work to place stories, announcements, and comments that further your advocacy agenda on progressive blogs frequented by members of the LGBT of color constituency, e.g., Joe.My.God, winner of GLAAD's 2011 Media Award for Outstanding Blog (http://joemygod.blogspot.com) and Blabbeando, a GLAAD award nominee (http://blabbeando.blogspot.com).

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10   The Opportunity Agenda and Belden Russonello & Stewart, "Human Rights in the United States: Findings from a National Survey," August 2007.
11   Quinnipiac University Poll, April 21-27, 2009.

► **Create "diaries" on popular blogs.** Usually anyone, or any organization, may create a diary, which may appear alongside the posts on the front page. Occasionally, the editors of a blog will highlight diary posts in a front-page post.

► **Write about common themes** as springboards for further and deeper blogging such as:

✓ An article about the sensitivities of African Americans around the use of the term "civil rights" to describe LGBT equality, referencing the public opinion research by the Arcus Operating Foundation;

✓ An article about common misrepresentations of "men on the down low";

✓ An article about public opinion research showing that Latinos are actually more supportive of LGBT equality than other segments of American society.

✓ Articles by religious leaders who support LGBT equality about why supporting LGBT rights is a matter of faith.

Facebook

► **Create Pages and Groups** and keep them active by updating content on a regular basis (everyday or every other day).

► **Post announcements** and other items on existing Pages and Groups that have a large following of LGBT people of color and their supporters.

► **Drive visitors to Facebook Pages and Groups** by devoting some funding to marketing campaigns based on "user preferences," i.e. information a user enters on his/her Facebook profile about age, relationship status, political values, etc. This would enable advocacy organizations to "advertise" on individual users' pages in order to generate support for specific policy goals.

Twitter

► **Use Twitter to increase an issue's visibility** by directing followers' attention to articles and other web pages and enlisting search engine optimization — pushing your materials towards the top of a list of search results.

► **Hold a Twitter Party**. A Twitter Party Guide[12] describes what they are and how they work: "A **twitter party** is a fast and fun virtual party, using the twitter platform. Usually held in the evening, twitter parties typically last 1-2 hours and are wonderful ways for people to connect and discuss a topic of choice. Most twitter parties have an expert panelist and party host to keep the party on topic. Twitter users tweet with a specified hashtag (#) for the party. The party host announces the hashtag prior to the event. If you look at the twitter party calendar, parties are listed by the hashtag (#). Tweetdeck[13] and Tweetgrid[14] make following a twitter party much easier.

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12   http://www.twitterpartyguide.com/what-is-a-twitter-party
13   http://www.tweetdeck.com/
14   http://tweetgrid.com/

YouTube

▶ **Use the immediacy and power of video to engage people's attention and spur them to action.** The "It Gets Better Project," which started with one video by Dan Savage and his partner, Terry, about their early struggles and their great life together, shows the potential reach and impact of YouTube. YouTube now hosts more than 25,000 "It Gets Better" user-created videos — testimonials by LGBT people and others encouraging LGBT people not to give up and to see that "love and happiness can be a reality in their future." These videos have been viewed more than 40 million times.

▶ **Launch your own "Nonprofit" YouTube channels**[15] — and build a twitter party around the launch — to attract new members, educate supporters and draw attention to issue campaigns.

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15   http://www.youtube.com/nonprofits