

Perpetuating use of the 'N-word'

ANGELA LINDSAY



Nigger (n.) - usually offensive: a black person; member of any dark-skinned race; its use among blacks is not always intended or taken as offensive... it is otherwise a word expressive of racial hatred and bigotry.

This was the partial definition given by Webster's dictionary, but apparently that has changed recently. I received an e-mail last week encouraging me to celebrate because the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, under the presidency of Kwesi Mfume, managed to get the Merriam-Webster company to discontinue associating black people with the word in its dictionaries. Forgive me if I fail to jump for joy.

Let's be honest here. The alteration of this definition is, at most, but a small, quiet battle victory in a 400 year-long war, which, at present, is all but lost on the few surviving members of the NAACP. Some may say that because I grew up in an era of integration that I may not know the cruelty the N-word can unleash. Wrong. I've been called the N-word by a hateful white person before. It hurts. Just because I have the freedom to choose where I want to sit on a city bus doesn't mean the sting of that word from a racist is any less potent today than it was 50 years ago. But what's more painful to endure is the ensuing jubilation for a victory that is obsolete and which effect is likely to be negligible at best. Not to mention the genuine possibility of contradiction.

We as black folk carp about "other" people saying this word and condemn them for it, even if they use it benignly, say, during an intellectual discussion. But why? We do it - many times in a far less commendable fashion. Some say we are empowered by adopting the word as our own, thereby ridding it of its historical nefariousness by transforming it into a term of endearment. We're all guilty of it. It slips out excitedly during football games, "That nigga can run!" We spit it out disgruntled when disgruntled, "That nigga makes me sick!" And black hip hop stars use it freely throughout their rap songs: Jigga/what's my (expletive) name/Jigga/and who I'm rollin' wit, huh/my niggas/niggas better get it right- (from "Jigga, My Nigga" by Jay-Z.) But as soon as anyone un-Negroid in features even forms their lips to say it, we get all up in arms and are ready to holler racism. We listen intently to white rapper Eminem who, by all accounts, is far from a bigot, to see if he even hints at saying "the word" on any

of his albums. We crouch in delicious anticipation, studying every verse of his complicated rhymes, and are poised to pounce on him like wolves to prey if he slips up and says it, no matter how amorously he may mean it.

This futile undertaking by the NAACP is about as embarrassing as the uproar generated by blacks in D.C. over David Howard's use of the word "niggardly." During a meeting with his staff, Howard, the white director of a Washington, D.C. municipal agency, told them that in light of budget cutbacks, he would have to be "niggardly" with funds. Niggardly is an adjective meaning "small, few or scanty; stingy, miserly" (New World Dictionary, 2nd College Ed.) and has no relation to, and actually pre-dates by about 300 years, the consonant slur.

Arguably, Howard could have exercised better judgment, but his use of a perfectly legitimate word certainly did not warrant his consequent resignation at the behest of insufferable protests and outcry by the black community. Not only has a man lost his livelihood, but it also made black folk appear ignorant. Are we so neurotic that we require all other races to tip-toe on eggshells around us? I thought we were a much stronger people than that.

Earlier this year, the NAACP received a lot of flak for the nomination of alleged child pornographer R. Kelly for an Image Award. In his defense, Mfume stated, "It continues to concern me that every now and then an Image Award nomination is put forth that fails to meet the high standards for positive, constructive images on which the program was originally created. Part of the reason for this is that the NAACP does not totally control the nominating process but is held totally responsible for all of the nominations." Though Mfume made a noble attempt to undermine the NAACP's involvement with the selection of less than caliber nominees for its award, it is still the NAACP Award, and its name is irrevocably attached to it. Such is the case with the definition of the N word.

So should the old definition of the N-word in all dictionaries continue as it once was - alluding to the degradation of African Americans? I don't know. Frankly, I don't think it matters what meaning is written down because we know the meaning when it's spoken aloud. The reality is that we need to shoulder much of the responsibility for the perpetuation of this word in our vocabulary. The onus is on us as black folk to collectively denounce this word which connotes racial insult and demotes our self-esteem.

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Taking on AIDS requires everlasting faith for believers

By Phill Wilson.
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Religious faith today is as controversial as ever. Witness the recent uproar over Mel Gibson's film on "the Passion of the Christ" has put religion and faith front and center in the public discourse.

People on both sides - critics and supporters - have been making emotional arguments based on their own views about God, Jesus and the Gospel. Clearly, Americans of faith don't shy away from a debatetake their faith seriously.

Black folks are no exception, I don't believe you can put more than one Black person in a room and not find faith. I'm not talking about plain old Christian faith, or Church faith. I'm talking about middle passage faith. I'm talking about the faith that helped us survive 300 years of slavery, reconstruction, and Jim Crow. I'm talking about the assassination of Medgar Evers, Malcom X, and Martin Luther King Jr.

As black people, we're always and we're talking a lot these days about our relationship with God and the role of religion faith in our communities and in our lives. So I find it interesting when so many black folks of "faith" But many are so reluctant to talk about a subject that should be on the tips of their tongues - a disease that's killing us without discretion.

Faith plays a central role in my life. As the grandson great grandson, and great great grandson of a black Baptist ministers, the silence on HIV is especially disconcerting.

AIDS is understandably difficult for many ministers and their congregations to talk about. Discussing AIDS means ministers have to talk candidly about sex, sexual orientation, drug use, poverty and a whole host of topics that make some people uncomfortable. But I believe this difficulty is the very reason why black churches need to lead the way. This is not the time for us to, to start shying away from the tough issues that affect our lives.

Black folks have always gone to church for more than just their spiritual salvation. Our churches are our refuge, our place of healing, our source They go because the black church is a place of refuge and healing, a source of strength and power for people living in awhen society that has too often told them their lives aretells us we are unimportant. Our churches provide the foundation for us to mobilize against that which would do us harm. And they go because churches help lead the struggle for health, equality and opportunity. The civil rights movement of the '50s and '60s was led by men and women of the cloth, and religious leaders should also be leading the fight against AIDS. After all, the spread of HIV is fueled by the very same social injustices that stoked the civil rights movement some half a century agoof the very issues - poverty, social inequality, and bigotry - that mobilized black churches in the past.

Our One inspiring example of faith in action is the New York-based organization The Balm in Gilead. For more than a decade, The Balm in Gilead has been preaching about AIDS to black churches, reminding black churches that, if nothing else, there is always prayer. Through its annual Black Church Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS, They've the Balm has helped thousands of churches become leaders in preventing HIV by providing training, networking and education.

The organization also sponsors the annual Black Church Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS, which engages more than 5,000 churches every March in a week of

prayer and HIV education activities.

Individual churches are also making a difference. In Miami, the 103-year-old Mount Tabor Missionary Baptist Church has made HIV/AIDS ministry one of its defining missions.

Located in a part of Miami with one of the highest AIDS rates in Florida, the church is working to change the lives of African Americans living with HIV/AIDS and those at high risk, including drug users, prostitutes and the homeless. The motto of the Metropolitan Interdenominational Church in Nashville is "Whosoever come".

The Church's AIDS ministry exemplifies that commitment to inclusion. The church also holds concerts and other events to raise awareness, offering free on-site testing and educational materials to those who attend. Mount Tabor and Metropolitan are just one two examples of churches that are taking similar steps.

These groups deserve our admiration for their courage, commitment, and compassion. But so much more needs to be done.

The third chapter of Ecclesiastes tells us "To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose." When it comes to AIDS, the season is now. We have the tools to end this epidemic. The challenge is whether we have the moral will to use those tools effectively and compassionately.

Black ministers need to use the power of the pulpit to challenge stigma, preach acceptance, and take their place as leaders in the development of AIDS programs and policy. Church members need to use the power of the pews to provide refuge to those living with HIV/AIDS, to counsel and support those who are risk, and to provide testing and other services to those who don't know their status. And as a community of faith, we should never underestimate the power of prayer.

Plenty of resources are available to help churches get involved. One great place to start is The Balm in Gilead. Check out their Web site (www.balmingilead.org) or call them at (888) 225-6243. Another important source of information is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 24-hour hotline at 800-342-2437 (in Spanish, 800-344-7432). I also encourage anyone who cares about the health of black communities to check out the Black AIDS Institute online, at www.blackaids.org, or to contact me by phone at (213) 989-0181/353-3610.

For those of us who are living with HIV/AIDS, faith is not a choice - it's an essential tool in our survival kit. I take comfort in my faith that neither my God, my family, nor my community will desert me. I also live with the faith that Black communities of faithchurches will take action to prevent others from becoming HIV's newest victimshelp end the pandemic.

I believe there are moments in time that when we have both the power and opportunity to move humanity forward. It is during those times when we rise to show the best of who we are or we sink into the depths of the worse of who we can be. We are at such a time and place. United in faith, let us rise to the occasion. Please, let us all pray together and rise up together to meet the challenge.

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Gay ban would hurt all families

By Robin Selby
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Did you know gay families save \$562.5 million in taxes annually? I was researching an article on the Alternative Minimum Tax and discovered the following. It's time the American public was informed of a few consequences relating to President Bush's discriminatory amendment banning gay marriage.

The proposed amendment not only discriminates against gay families but also affords discrimination against "traditional" families through a difference in higher tax levies affecting 3 million American households. In 2005, an estimated 9 million American households will suffer even higher tax bills if President Bush does not extend the current timeline of the Alternative Minimum Tax.

The Alternative Minimum tax affects middle and upper class (married heterosexual) families whose combined incomes range from 100K to 500K. These families pay an average \$3000 more taxes each year because of the tax intended to levy wealthy families who were exempting from taxes altogether. It is only affecting heterosexual families and, traditionally defined, married couples. Same sex couples are exempted because they are not permitted the "freedom" to marry and file joint tax returns!

The 2000 census estimated 100K non-traditional families (same-sex couple households). The actual figure is measured at 250K but there are many in the closet because of our nation's failure to permit equal civil rights and recognition for these same-sex couple households. The majority of same sex couples (around 75 percent) are professionals with combined household income of \$100,000 to \$500,000. An estimated 187,500 same-sex households would fall into the AMT tax bracket.

Do the math:
187,500 (same sex couples/households)

X \$3000 (avg AMT additional contribution per household) = \$562.5 million.

An estimated \$562.5 million dollars annually are exempted from tax collections because of our government's refusal to recognize and allow basic civil freedoms to gay citizens!

Heterosexual families are required to pay the greater of the regular tax or (after losing many deductions from the AMT rules) their Alternative Minimum tax which is usually averages \$3000 more than their regular tax bracket. The amendment intended for Gay America discriminates against gay families by denying basic civil freedoms but also poses an unfair tax disadvantage to traditional families!

Many Americans do not realize the significant effects of discrimination until it directly affects them. President Bush may succeed in denying civil liberties to Gay American families but he is also penalizing the pockets of the "family" structure he hopes to protect.

Please consider carefully the full ramifications of discrimination. It affects everyone, not just the class of citizens for which it is intended. If you support this amendment, keep in mind you are also protecting gay families from paying their full tax bills if they were allowed the rights of marriage.

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