

# Sharpton chides Black homophobia

By Jamal E. Watson  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

NEW YORK (NNPA) - Alarmed by the staggering number of new cases of HIV/AIDS in the African-American community, Rev. Al Sharpton is launching a new initiative aimed at addressing the stigma that has long surrounded the disease.

Sharpton is calling for Black preachers to assist him in confronting the issue of homophobia among African-Americans, a topic long considered taboo, especially in the Black religious community.

"There is latent homophobia in our community," said Sharpton, who announced

Roskoff, who has known and worked with Sharpton for more than 20 years. "I think it's always an excellent time to move forward to fight bigotry and homophobia," said Roskoff.

He said that Sharpton's decision to focus on this issue will help to generate national attention and could very well save lives in the long-term.

At the reception held at Roskoff's West Village apartment, mayoral candidates C. Virginia Fields and City Council Speaker Gifford Miller were joined by other political leaders and city officials, including Thomas R. Frieden, who pointed out that

"Sadly, Black churches have not stepped up to the plate on HIV/AIDS as they have historically stepped up to the plate on other issues."

— Phill Wilson  
Executive Director  
Black Aids Institute



to make this design."

Still, Sharpton, Forbes, and others, are likely to face resistance from many who remain adamant that homosexuality is a sin.

But Phill Wilson, the executive director of the Los Angeles-based Black AIDS Institute, said that Sharpton, who remains extremely popular among African-American preachers, could use his national prominence to help challenge a particular mindset.

"He can serve to encourage his peers to speak out," said Wilson, adding that the issue has become a lightning rod in the Black religious community. He laments that Black preachers have not done enough to adequately address the issue.

"Historically, the church has been a sanctuary for Black people," said Wilson. "Sadly, Black churches have not stepped up to the plate on HIV/AIDS as they have historically stepped up to the plate on other issues."

The absence of a discussion about the disease, coupled with growing sentiments within the Black community that homosexuality is wrong, has led many African-American gays and lesbians to hide their sexual identity for fear of being rejected, Wilson said.

Marjorie Fields-Harris, the executive director of Sharpton's National Action

Network, will spearhead the initiative.

"It's a lot larger than passing out a condom," said Harris. "We have to address the social factors. We can go into the churches and the community and address this issue from a grassroots perspective."

Sharpton said that an equal amount of attention must be focused on homophobia. To this day, he remains troubled by the way that his mentor, Bayard Rustin, a civil rights activist and a close confidant to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., had been treated by some Black leaders when they learned that he was gay. Some urged King to kick Rustin out of the movement, but to his credit, he refused, Sharpton said.

During his presidential race last year, Sharpton was one of the only candidates who publicly supported gay marriage, and earlier this year, at the request of Brian Ellner, an openly gay candidate running for Manhattan borough president, Sharpton marched in the city's Gay Pride Parade.

"Rev. Sharpton can do enormous good on this issue in New York City and nationally," said Ellner. "We still need to get past old concepts of this disease [HIV/AIDS] and continue to challenge homophobia."

Jamal E. Watson writes for the Amsterdam News.

*"Your job is to get up every day and be grateful to God for your DNA. It took an artist divine to make this design."*

— Rev. James A. Forbes  
Riverside Church



the initiative recently at the home of Allen Roskoff, a gay rights activist.

Over the next year, the civil rights activist will conduct public forums at churches and schools aimed at educating the public about HIV/AIDS, while using his bully pulpit to caution against discriminating against gays and lesbians.

"I'm going to challenge the bias in our community," said Sharpton, who also plans to begin airing public service announcements on Black radio stations that will train a spotlight on the epidemic, a leading cause of death among African-Americans, especially in the South.

"This is a bold step for the Reverend to take," said

the deadly disease is growing among African-Americans, particularly Black women. They pledged to join with Sharpton to assist.

Sharpton's campaign comes at a time when a number of Black preachers, including Rev. James A. Forbes, senior minister at Riverside Church in Harlem, have been trying to counter the anti-gay rhetoric resounding from Black pulpits across America each week.

At one recent church service, Forbes told his congregation that discrimination against gays and lesbians has no place in society.

"Your job is to get up every day and be grateful to God for your DNA," Forbes said. "It took an artist divine

# Southern lynching re-enacted

By Alexander M. Ford  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

ATLANTA (NNPA) - Microfilm copies of the Atlanta Daily World show the original headlines reporting the "Monroe Massacre" from 1946. The first one, "LYNCHING BEE STAGED AT MONROE" is from the July 27, 1946, paper. It was followed up the next day with photographs from the scene and calls for the Governor and FBI to act, beneath the headline "\$10,000 REWARD OF-

FERED FOR GA. LYNCHERS."

The July 30, 1946, headline shows "FBI PROBES TAKE OVER MONROE MASSACRE; HARRISON GUARDED." Additional stories on that page noted: "Lynch Victims Laid to Rest On Georgia 'Black Sunday,'" and "White Methodists Blast Monroe Mob," and "Negro Publishers Ask Arnall, Truman to Act On Mobsters."

The July 31, 1946, story headline said, "TRUMAN

ORDERS LYNCH PROBE," and reports "Mass-Meet At Wheat Street Thursday Night — Leaders To Seek Statewide Aid for Sorrow-Stricken."

The newspaper continued to follow the story and build support for the community. It continues to recall the story on each anniversary.

Streams of sweat slithered down the faces of close to 200 spectators who huddled closely together at the entrance of Moore's Ford Bridge in Monroe, Ga., the

day that marked the anniversary of the Monroe Massacre on July 25, 1946.

It has been nearly 60 years since the Walton County landmark shrouded a tear-inducing act of hatred. This was the scene of the brutal slayings of two Black couples and an unborn child — Roger and Dorothy Malcom (7 months pregnant); George and Mae Dorsey. They were dragged from a car by an estimated 15 to 25 Klansmen, beaten and

# Holy books of faith raises legal issues

By Cash Michaels  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

"The basic purpose of using sworn testimony is to ensure that the information being provided is truthful and as correct as is possible." — Special Agent Dick Searle, Iowa Division Of Criminal Investigation

"Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

Those who have testified in a court of law anywhere in North Carolina or across the country recognize these words to be the oath administered to witnesses prior to their sworn testimony.

As has been procedure for decades, the right hand is raised, and the left hand is placed on the Holy Bible.

"I do."

WILMINGTON, N.C. (NNPA) - The courts have long favored the Christian book of faith as the ultimate symbol of truth. For a Christian, to swear on it means that to tell anything other than the truth in testimony is a blasphemy and a sin before God that will be taken into account on Judgment Day.

But what if a witness or juror isn't a Christian? What if he or she is a Jew or a Muslim? Both groups have their own books of faith, their own symbols of religious truth.

The U.S. Constitution guarantees them the freedom to practice their religious faith free of government intrusion or influence. Inherently, that means they cannot be forced to either worship or practice any faith other than their own, and their chosen faith must be respected as such.

If a Jew or a Muslim is forced to swear to "tell the truth" on a Christian Bible, are they, in fact, telling the truth if a religious foundation of another faith is used?

And are North Carolina courts favoring one religious faith over another when they designate only the Christian Bible to be used?

These are now the legal questions and issues that have to be hashed out in a Wake County Superior Courtroom as North Carolina's criminal justice system has to wrestle, some say, with its own hypocrisy.

The final answer will have a profound impact on communities of faith, especially in the African-American community, where a significant number of Muslims reside.

Recently, the American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina filed a lawsuit against the state of North Carolina "...challenging North Carolina state courts' practice of refusing to allow people of non-Christian faiths to take religious oaths using any text other than the Christian Bible," according to the organization's press release.

The lawsuit arose from an incident in Greensboro, N.C., when a Muslim woman set to testify in Guilford County court, requested to be sworn-in on the Holy Qur'an instead of the Bible.

She was refused.

The local Muslim community Al Ummil Ummat Islamic Center even offered to donate several copies of the Holy Qur'an to the Guilford Courts, but they, too, were rebuffed.

Guilford County Senior Resident Superior Court Judge W. Douglas Albright and Guilford Chief District Court

(See Qur'an, Page 12)

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