

'Til Ballot Initiative Do Us Part: Marriage Equality, Religion and Civil Rights

Thursday, March 19, 2009

4:00 pm – 8:00 pm

**American University Washington College of Law
4801 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Room 603, Washington, DC**

On Election Day 2008, voters in Arizona, California and Florida passed ballot initiatives amending their state constitutions to recognize as civil marriages only unions between one man and one woman, joining 26 other states that already had passed similar amendments. Arkansas voters favored a ban on adoption and foster parenting by people "cohabitating outside a valid marriage," which proponents said was necessary to fight "the gay agenda." Some commentators pointed to exit polls and surveys purporting to show that African-Americans, Latinos/as, and adherents to conservative religious traditions supported these antigay initiatives at significantly higher rates than other communities. The media often quoted same-sex marriage opponents as citing the Bible as the basis for their votes.

This conference brings together nationally prominent religious, media and legal figures to discuss key questions raised by these results, including: Were the exit polls and surveys showing a marked difference in support for marriage equality between white and of-color communities accurate? What explains that difference if, indeed, it exists? What else did the exit polls and survey results show that the media failed to report? What role should religion play in the debate around civil marriage rights for gay Americans? Why is implying an analogy between the gay rights and the African-American civil rights movements the source of tension? Can fair parallels be drawn between the antigay marriage bans and the anti-miscegenation laws struck down by 1967's *Loving v. VA*? And what do these election results teach us about the pros and cons of ballot initiatives as a means of amending state constitutions?

4:00 pm

Keynote Address

Shannon Minter, Legal Dir., National Center for Lesbian Rights; Lead Counsel, CA Marriage Cases and Prop 8 Appeal

4:45 pm

What Happened on November 4th? The Confluence of Race, Religion, Sexual Orientation and Politics at the Ballot Box

Prof. Helen Alvaré, George Mason University School of Law

Prof. Mary Frances Berry (invited), Segal Professor of American Social Thought and Professor of History, University of Pennsylvania; Former Chair, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Rev. Derek McCoy, Assoc. Pastor, Hope Christian Church (Beltsville, MD), and CA Yes on 8 Outreach Director (for Family Research Council)

Rev. Sen. C. Anthony Muse (D-MD) (invited), Maryland State Senator and Bishop, Ark of Safety Christian Church

Sen. Jamin Raskin (D-MD), Maryland State Senator and Prof. of Law, American University Washington College of Law

Lara Schwartz, Legal Director and Chief Legislative Counsel, Human Rights Campaign

Moderator: *Prof. Angela J. Davis*, American University Washington College of Law

6:15 pm **Break**

6:30 pm **Moving Forward: The Political, Legislative and Cultural Outlook for the LGBT Civil Rights Movement**

Jonathan Capehart, Washington Post Editorial Board

Jasper Hendricks, Director of Field Operations and Political Programs, National Black Justice Coalition

Prof. Darren Hutchinson American University Washington College of Law

Richard Kim, Senior Editor, The Nation

Rev. Dr. Stephanie Nagley, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Bethesda, MD

Rashad Robinson, Senior Director of Media Programs, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)

Moderator: *Prof. Tony Varona*, American U. Washington College of Law; GLAAD National Board of Directors Member

8:00 pm **Adjourn**

(Refreshments and *hors d'oeuvres* will be available throughout conference.)

General Registration – no charge, but required.

To register, please go to www.wcl.american.edu/secle/registration

For further information about registration, please contact: Office of Special Events & Continuing Legal Education, American University Washington College of Law, 202.274.4075 or secle@wcl.american.edu