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**“The Impact of the Church on the Gay African – American”**

Once in a blue moon, I think about the idea of Black culture and the gay life. I’ve thought about it more often over the weeks after Presidential Candidate Barack Obama gave his speech about race and referencing the Sunday church hour as being one of the most influential hours. While his speech was rather surprising to some, I found relief in his comments. For years I have listened to African-American churches mention how unnatural and sinful it is to be gay.

When I was first coming out in 2002, I went to Mississippi to visit my grandmother and be the “good grandson.” I never attended her church because the service was old, outdated, and none of my other family members were present. The one time that I attended her church, during this visit, I felt like the minister was speaking to me. “There are men out there who think that it is possible to love other men....It is just not right. Now they want rights to get married.... The devil is out there.” After hearing the message, I felt like there was nowhere for me to hide and that I was going to go to Hell after I died. I couldn’t wait to get back home.

I eventually returned to Los Angeles and began to feel comfortable with myself and my journey. I came out to my parents, friends, and others. I still feel uncomfortable about talking about my sexuality in the South because it is just not acceptable there, but Los Angeles is much more accepting... or so I thought. I went to Church on Easter Sunday 2008 in Los Angeles, being the good Christian boy that I am, and the minister included a message on a man who found the path to overcoming his “homosexual tendencies.” I was horrified. The message was very similar to the one I heard in Mississippi in 2002. Lack of understanding and acceptance for gays in the African-American life is prevalent and I am frustrated.

I have recently decided to practice my faith as an individual rather than part of a church. However, my heart feels for the African-American teen that knows in his/ her inner soul that he/ she is gay. There must be action that we can take to address the needs of teens that feel like I do even though I am a 31 year old man. I am worried about the unhealthy behavior that may influence our people as they come to terms with their true nature. This is why I joined the Jordan-Rustin Coalition. I want to make a difference and can only hope that there are others out there like me.