New York Reaps the Monetary Benefits of Allowing Gays To Marry While California's Economy Remains On Life-Support

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How allowing gays to marry in California could rescue a State teetering on the brink of bankruptcy-

A Time For Us And Marriage Equality!
"Today, you would think that because I am an African-American, that I would have awakened with a new zest for living, a belief that all things are possible and a renewed hope in America, the Land of the Free and Home of the Brave. But instead, I felt a chilling numbness emotionally very similar to the kind of feeling that I experience when someone close to me in my family has just died!"

These were the words penned in my Pulitzer Nominated book, "Love Won't Let Me Be Silent" after Proposition 8 passed in California, amid the euphoria and jubilation of electing America's first African-American President. At that time my feelings were very conflicted because there was a part of me that was overjoyed because Barack Obama had been elected. Conversely, another part of me was in complete despair because of the bigotry and hatred that would later take on the form of denying same-gender-loving people the right to adopt children in other states and/or the right to wed the person of their choosing; in addition to the countless suicides, abuse and extreme acts of violence committed against LGBT community - all the direct result from the implementation of this hideous Bill!

Prior to the passing of Proposition 8 (aka Prop. 8), African-American clergy, Catholics, Evangelicals, Mormons and some non-denominational Christians urged their parishioners to vote "YES" on Prop. 8, ignoring and completely disregarding the fact that thousands of LGBT people attend their churches and participate in every aspect of ministry, pay their tithes, and have an undying devotion to the ministry. Parishioners were told, "We must do everything we can to preserve the Institution of marriage." Oh, if they would have only acted earlier with the same fervor years ago, perhaps heterosexual Christians would not lead the country in divorces and separations -- long before Prop. 8, gay marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships were ever established.Yes, you heard me right! I was amazed to discover that born-again Christians are more likely than others to experience a divorce. These statistics have been the case for quite some time. Even more disturbing, perhaps is that when these divorcees publicly announce their divorce, many of them are rejected by their community of faith rather than provided with support and healing. It is apparent that many Christians are quick to criticize gay unions, having forgotten to

remove the beam from their own eye before trying to get the speck out of their brother's eye (Matthew 7:5). And what of the Bishops, whose stories garner constant media attention in the Black churches throughout our great country? The same Bishops, who bash from the pulpit, are on their third and fourth marriage, cleverly cover up sex and drug scandals, and violently abuse their wives. The media is constantly exposing the fact that more and more of these same Bishops are committing adultery and fathering illegitimate children with women in their congregations, other than their spouses. And let's not forget to mention the ones who are on the downlow (meaning they are closeted gays) who cheat with other men!

What is even more alarming is that HIV/AIDS and poverty in the African American and Hispanic Communities is staggering! Furthermore, many, if not most of these same Pastors, Bishops, Priests and ministers who encouraged their parishioners to vote "Yes" on Prop 8, don't even have a food pantry for their members, senior care programs, effective HIV/AIDS outreach programs and sadly, no prison ministry rehabilitation program; a tragic oversight, especially since there are over 170,000 inmates in the California penal system (many of whom are Black and Hispanic). Yet, they thought nothing of spending over 60 million dollars to oppose same-sex unions, money that they could have and should have used to fund much needed programs like these! Moreover, another glaring example of the Church's misdirected priorities, are the many cases of their parishioners being evicted out of their apartments and homes, unable to procure financial support from their home churches. The same home church that will justify and miraculously produce money to fight Marriage Equality issues like Prop 8!

One reason I always cringe when I hear Pastors bash the gay community from the pulpit is because little do they realize, had it not been for the gay community, little or nothing would have been done to combat the AIDS virus, and the death toll would have been even more catastrophic. It should also be noted that because the African-American and Hispanic American heterosexual community is disproportionately affected by the pandemic, subsequently, their faith community offers little to no services. As a result of working hand-in-hand with many AIDS organizations, I can attest to the fact that thousands of heterosexual males and females frequently access HIV treatment and Case Management services provided by the gay community -- whom by the way attend these same churches. I am extremely grateful to the gay community for responding so compassionately and effectively to those suffering from the virus because the majority of services and medications that are offered today is the direct result of their resolute response. The LGBT community continues to effectively and compassionately minister to the needs of people from all walks of life; doing what many Evangelical Christians have failed to do, even today!

As a child, I was taught to believe that the Constitution created by our founding fathers would always protect the rights of the people. Even if, humanity somehow lost its way in the muck, mire and rhetoric of misguided souls and redneck politicians, I believed that somehow, truth and justice would prevail and win out in the end because after all, did we not elect an African-American President? Isn't that proof? I know that such a belief to some may seem naÃ□Â□Ã,Â¨ve. Still, deep down inside, I keep hearing the chant of our forefathers boldly declaring to my heart and consciousness these empowering words that I refuse to cast aside: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men (and women) are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness . . ."

These words became a reality on June 24, 2011, for the people of New York when their State Senate approved marriage equality legislation, despite of the disgraceful passing of Proposition 8 in California three years earlier. All the despair I felt back in 2008 when Prop. 8 passed was a stark contrast to the

immense joy that I experienced yesterday along with the multitudes from every race and gender, who exuberantly celebrated in the streets of New York after such a long awaited victory. But all the euphoria wore off when I awakened this morning, and was slapped in the face by the reality that I still lived in California. I wiped the sleep out of my eyes, showered, got dressed and boarded a train headed to luncheon that a circle at my church was giving for the fathers and mothers in our congregation.

Even though I have been blessed financially and have garnered international attention and media acclaim as an author, I have chosen not to move out of my present neighborhood. I like the interaction with the people I meet and it keeps me in touch with my community and aware of the things that people living in my neighborhood experience in their day-to-day struggles to survive. It also allows me to experience firsthand what is like to be black, gay and Christian, all of which I am very proud of!

Because I am well known in my community, (though many adamantly disapprove of my sexual orientation and interpretation of scripture), it affords me the opportunity to dialogue with ministers, local politicians, and with the movers and shakers in my community and I am often able to effect change because I live among them. Admittedly, it isn't easy and I often become discouraged because of their close-mindedness and deep seated homophobia and think of retreating to a more upscale community where same-gender-loving people are more accepted and celebrated, but I just can't do it! I can't do it because of the lingering homophobic plague stalking my community that endangers the lives of children and youth I see going to and fro on a day-to-day basis. I cannot tell you how many times I have had to intervene to stop fights and bullying on buses and trains (one of the primary reasons I use public transportation). I realize that this is dangerous and often places me in great jeopardy, but I refuse to sit idly by and let another innocent child or young adult be abused by a hateful, ignorant person, simply because they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender! The reality is that in these situations, few people are willing to come to the aid of our children, even if they feel the bullying or abuse is wrong or inappropriate and this saddens me - but I refuse to be one of those people!!!

What is perhaps more devastating about the passing of Prop. 8 is not only the negative social effect it has had on our community, but also the devastating financial affect it has also generated because we missed the tremendous window of opportunity for financial gain and the potential to create many much needed new jobs. You see my brothers and sisters, prejudice and intolerance is unfortunately a double edged sword because it tragically eliminated the possibility of California bringing in an estimated 385 million dollars of revenue over a ten year period, if same-gender-loving people had been allowed to marry. Statistically speaking, married people often accumulate more wealth and have more to spend on property and consumer goods, which bolsters tax revenue.

Thank God that in New York; Governor Cuomo had the wisdom and good sense to see the tremendous economic potential and opportunity that his state had to improve its economy. He wisely acted by seizing this opportunity to sign the Bill into Law only hours after it had been passed. It was a good thing that he did, because wedding plans are likely to generate an estimated $284 million dollars to the state's economy, according to a report by the Independent Democratic Conference.

In the wake of New York's good fortune, California now teeters or the brink of bankruptcy, unable to balance its budget, barely even able to keep the doors of its schools and higher learning institutions opened, due to mismanagement of funds and overspending, and sadly, because of missed opportunities. Even though Chief U.S. District Judge Vaughn overturned Prop 8, the matter is still not resolved because the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals has been sitting on the matter. I believe the delay is due to Prop. 8 being a very contentious issue and the Commissioners themselves are conservatives and fear the wrath of

right wing conservatives that could result should they overturn the proposition. In the meantime, California's economy is in critical condition and on financial life support! Moreover, it is in desperate need of an economic boost. Many single people in the LGBT community are still being unfairly denied the right to marry the person they love and receive their entitled constitutional and federal benefits. Perhaps, the courageous move on the part of New York and Washington, D.C. lawmakers will embolden them and motivate them to do what they already know in their hearts is the right thing to do and overturn Prop. 8. Their courageous intervention would rescue our failing economy which is currently in desire straits and preserve the integrity and promise of our Constitution by courageously granting equal rights to same-gender-loving people - accomplishing the very objective that we elected them to do!

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Terry Angel Mason is an internationally renowned author, keynote speaker, poet, singer, songwriter, minister, and Civil Rights activist who currently resides is Southern California. He is the author of three popular titles, Love Won't Let Me Be Silent, They Say That I am Broken, and The Dream Keeper, set to be released later this year). A revered leader and global change agent, Terry Angel Mason's mission is to inspire, educate and empower millions around the world, and promote love and acceptance for all people. A highly sought after author and activist, Mason has been featured in The Advocate, Broadway World, The Windy City Times Newspaper, New Pittsburgh Courier, New England Enquirer, Our Weekly Magazine, Out Impact, ME Magazine, POZ Magazine, A & U Magazine, Real Health Magazine, Q Magazine, FUSE Online Magazine, Echelon Magazine, and in many other publications.

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