

# THE NEW BLACK

## DISCUSSION GUIDE: CAMPUS

SEPTEMBER 2013

# WHAT IS NATIONAL COMING OUT WEEK?

---

Trace the movement for marriage equality back to its roots and along the way, you'll find one of the most galvanizing moments in the fight for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) civil rights took place on October 11, 1987.

The National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights – the second national demonstration on behalf of gay equality and the largest to that point – drew an estimated half a million people to the nation's capital. Though it would take years before the march's political and legislative agenda would begin to be realized, it was nonetheless an historic and transformative moment. "The Great March," as it would later be remembered, effectively raised awareness of the urgency of LGBT issues and gave visibility to the national gay rights movement.

One year later, National Coming Out Day was established as the annual commemoration of that pivotal day in the fight for LGBT rights. Today a weeklong celebration from October 11-17, National Coming Out Week (NCOW) is a time when LGBT and same gender loving people and their allies can recognize those who have come out and offer support, acceptance and community to others who may be living in the closet. It is a chance to publicly recognize the often difficult journey to self-acceptance that many LGBT people must undertake. Celebrated in all 50 states as well as internationally, NCOW provides an opportunity to advocate for equality and safety for all people, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Against the backdrop of the Supreme Court's historic recent decision to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), the adoption of same-sex marriage in 13 states, and the continued fight for marriage equality everywhere, NCOW 2013 is set to be one of the most celebratory and important to date.

As part of this celebration, we invite our partners to bring *The New Black* to their own communities. With help from Tugg – a web-based platform that lets you screen movies in a theater near you – you can organize your own special event around the film. We hope you'll use the movie to spark a dialogue on civil rights – from recent LGBT strides to the gutting of key parts of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 – and other issues addressed by the film. For more information about hosting your own theatrical screening of *The New Black*, visit us online at [www.newblackfilm.com/screenings/local](http://www.newblackfilm.com/screenings/local).

Thank you for your support,  
*The New Black* Team

# LETTER FROM SHARON J. LETTMAN-HICKS

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CEO, NATIONAL BLACK JUSTICE COALITION (NBJC)

---



As the nation's leading black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender civil rights organization, the National Black Justice Coalition works to educate and advocate on behalf of black LGBT people.

Without a doubt, our movement for full equality is at a tipping point. We witnessed the first ever sitting president affirm his support for gay and lesbian couples to get married. Moreover, research shows that more and more Americans are standing on the right side of history in support of the LGBT community. Our national consciousness is ripe and incredibly receptive to a film like *The New Black*.

*The New Black* is a brilliant launching pad for communities to start having the difficult conversations around race and the movement for LGBT equality. As one of the film's subjects, I witnessed firsthand the tireless work of director Yoruba Richen and her team as they masterfully wove together authentic stories of family and faith – two structures that are the bedrock of the black community.

This powerful film allows us to drop our guard, leave our biases at the door and reach the masses with a message that illuminates the humanity of our community. It breaks down the oftentimes abstract policy and cryptic scripture to real-life challenges everyday Americans can understand. *The New Black* puts a face to the people living at the intersection of black and LGBT. It also humanizes the voices of dissension and brings a realness to both sides of the debate.

As our movement for full equality continues to blaze forward, it is critical that we have these conversations at the dinner table, in our churches, and throughout our communities. We can do it with this film and with your help. The time is now.

In community,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharon J. Lettman-Hicks". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Sharon J. Lettman-Hicks

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

---



The months leading up to the 2008 election were intensely emotional for many Americans, especially African-Americans. The idea of a black president was something that we had routinely dismissed as something that would not happen in our lifetime.

At the same time, marriage equality was on the ballot in California in the form of Proposition 8. As the night progressed it became clear that the right for same-sex couples to marry – which had recently been granted by the California courts – was going to be taken away. The euphoria that many felt about Barack Obama's election was countered by spontaneous protests and visible outrage at the loss of marriage equality. Almost immediately, it was reported that African-Americans voted for Proposition 8 by 70%. That these reports later proved false was not enough to counter the narrative that blacks were to blame for loss of marriage equality while gays had helped elect Obama. Many of us who were members of both communities watched horrified as latent resentments, outright racism and homophobia bubbled to the top of the national political scene.

For over three years I followed how this issue was being debated and understood in the African-American community. In the course of production, I realized that the issue of gay rights in the black community is in many ways a fight over the African-American family, which has been a contested space since the time of slavery. So marriage is not just about marriage for black people – it's also about how blacks have become accepted as legitimate participants in American society. The gay marriage question has forced a conversation in the black community, which is taking place in our churches, our houses, our neighborhoods and the ballot box. We're at an historic moment where LGBT issues are at the forefront of the national debate. I hope that the film will contribute to the important conversation about race, sexuality and political rights and the intersection of the three. And that it will reach diverse audiences within heterogeneous contexts and communities – from the black, to the gay, to the faith community and the general public as well.

**Yoruba Richen**, Director/Producer  
*The New Black*

# THE NEW BLACK SYNOPSIS

---

*The New Black* is a documentary that tells the story of how the African-American community is grappling with the gay rights issue in light of the recent gay marriage movement and the fight over civil rights. The film documents activists, families and clergy on both sides of the campaign to legalize gay marriage and examines homophobia in the black community's institutional pillar – the black church – and reveals the Christian right wing's strategy of exploiting this phenomenon in order to pursue an anti-gay political agenda.

*The New Black* takes viewers into the pews and onto the streets and provides a seat at the kitchen table as it tells the story of the historic fight to win marriage equality in Maryland and charts the evolution of this divisive issue within the black community.

# THE BLACK CHURCH IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN LIVES AND HISTORY

---



**“The black church was a place to go when we had no place else to go.”**

— **JULIAN BOND**, Former Chairman, NAACP, speaking in *The New Black*

It is impossible to talk about the history of African-American civil rights without talking about the black church. Throughout America’s racially charged history, from slavery through Jim Crow to the Civil Rights era, African-American churches have been at the forefront of the black community’s struggle for freedom and justice.

The church has served both as a communal gathering place and the cultural cornerstone of black life, as well as a space of resistance and refuge against white racism and discrimination. As Bishop Yvette Flunder states in *The New Black*, “it has historically been the center of education and information,” offering “a sense of belonging, a sense of self-worth and value.”

From its earliest days, the black church played a key role in black liberation, both figuratively and literally. Enslaved blacks often established their own congregations and organized underground churches and secret religious meetings. There, in covert defiance of slave owners’ use of religion to instill obedience and justify slavery, they created their own interpretations of scripture. Many freed black communities around the country raised funds to build houses of worship, making churches some of the first properties held by African-American landowners. Black churches hosted abolitionist meetings, were safe houses for runaway slaves, and gave slaves a place to clandestinely acquire the illegal skill of literacy. Religion itself offered black Americans solace and strength against virulent racism and injustice beyond the church walls.

In Reconstruction and beyond, the black church continued to serve as the linchpin of black American society. Denied access to mainstream American institutions and organizations, houses of worship quickly became the nucleus around which black civic life revolved. Black churches housed schools, and served as the social, political, artistic, business and spiritual epicenters of African-American communities.

# THE BLACK CHURCH IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN LIVES AND HISTORY CONTINUED

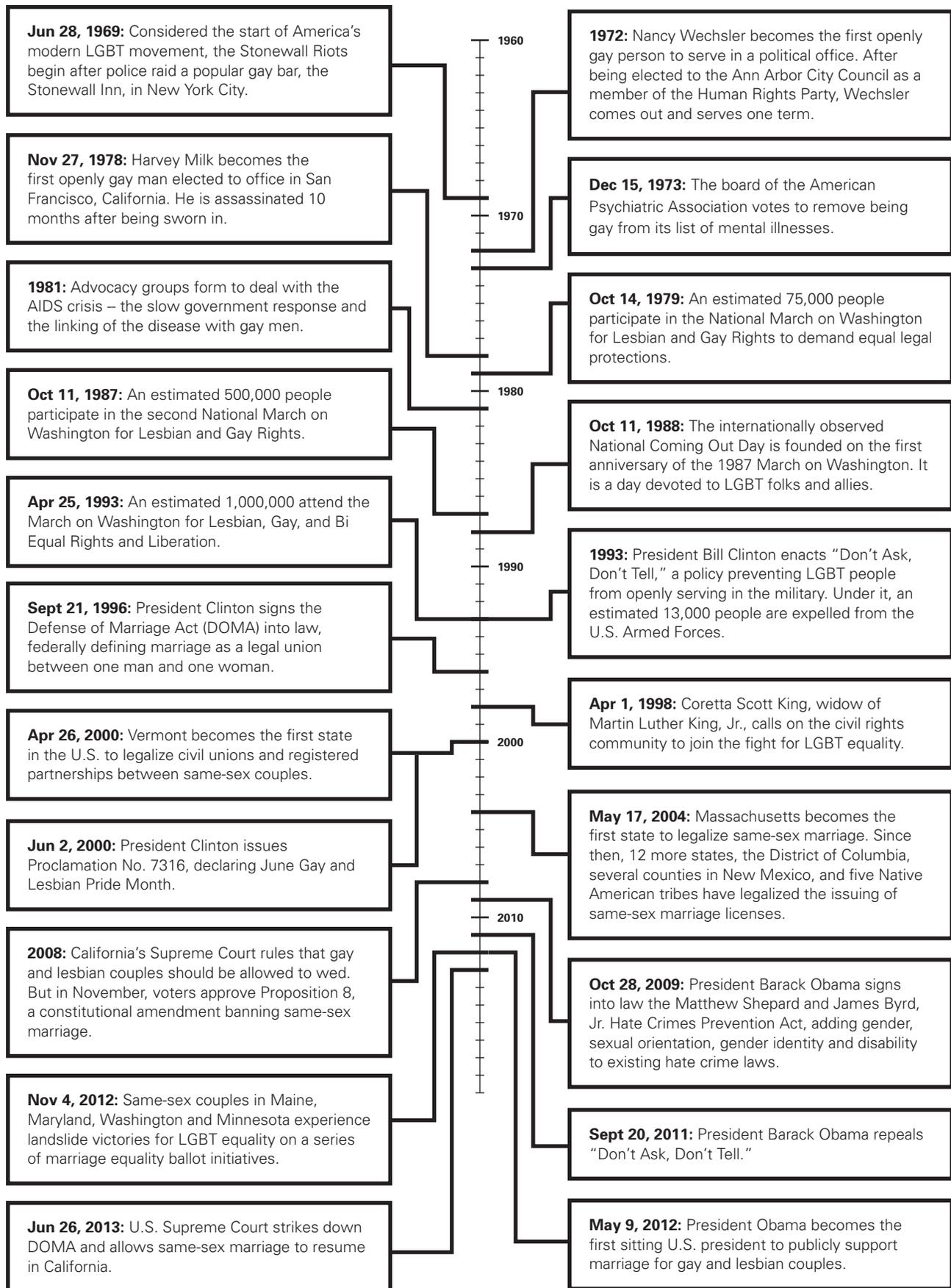
---

Black clergy – who spoke each Sunday to issues of particular relevance to their African-American parishioners – were voices of prominence and respect in the community. The church was dedicated to the well-being, safety and survival of black people in an otherwise hostile and dangerous environment.

The longstanding connection between the black church and African-American political life remained in evidence during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The church and black activist clergy would play a key role in organizing and supporting the grassroots campaigns that ultimately led to some of the movement's most historic victories. Civil rights leaders such as Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth and Rev. Abraham Woods all rose to prominence from pulpits in local black houses of worship. Church leaders inspired their congregations to activism, and churches could be relied on to provide spaces to meet and resources to support the movement.

Today's black church continues to play an important role in the African-American community. Recently, the church has found itself at the center of controversy over the fight for marriage equality. Mainstream LGBT activists struggle to understand why a church that has historically played such a critical role in the achievement of civil rights for African-Americans hasn't taken up the fight for LGBT rights. *The New Black* offers a close up look at both the contemporary black church, the struggle for gay rights and the tension between the two.

# TIMELINE: THE HISTORY OF THE LGBT MOVEMENT



# BLACK & LGBT: THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERSECTIONALITY

---

“There’s no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we don’t live single-issue lives.”

— **AUDRE LORDE** (1934 – 1992), Black Lesbian Writer and Activist

Oftentimes, black LGBT people are rendered invisible. Discussions around LGBT equality frequently fail to acknowledge the existence of LGBT people of color while conversations in communities of color often silence the voices of people living at the intersections of racial justice and LGBT equality. Not only do people of color who are a part of the LGBT community have to face constant stigma and discrimination for their sexual orientation, they must also overcome the challenges that are coupled with being a person of color.

When it comes to issues such as poverty, homelessness, anti-LGBT violence and bullying, black LGBT people and their families are disproportionately more vulnerable than their white counterparts. Yet the face of the LGBT movement hardly reflects this. For black LGBT people, homophobia is typically accompanied by racism, sexism and many other layers of oppression. These simultaneous systems of discrimination contribute to social inequality.

From our streets to our schools, the colossal impact of intersectionality and dual oppression is evident. Black transgender people, for instance, live in extreme poverty with 34% reporting a household income of less than \$10,000 per year <sup>(1)</sup>. This is more than twice the rate for transgender people of all races (15%), four times the general black population rate (9%), and eight times the general U.S. population rate (4%). When it comes to youth, more than 80% of LGBT students of color reported hearing the word “gay” used in a negative way often or frequently in school.<sup>(2)</sup> More than half of African-American LGBT students (51%) reported also being verbally harassed because of their race or ethnicity.

It doesn’t stop there. Research from the Movement Advancement Project shows that LGBT people of color are more likely to parent than their white counterparts (with African-American same-sex couples being the most likely group). As a result, the lack of legal protections and antiquated laws “undermine families’ economic strength by denying access to safety net programs, family tax credits and health insurance simply because families do not fit within expected norms.”<sup>(3)</sup>

Despite being historically marginalized and overlooked, black LGBT people have forged an existence for themselves and their loved ones. They have also helped weave the intricate fabric of this nation – our black history and American history alike. Most recently, President Barack Obama awarded the highest civilian honor, the Medal of Freedom, to Bayard Rustin, openly gay advisor to Martin Luther King, Jr. and chief architect of the historic March on Washington in 1963. While much work lies ahead, Rustin exemplifies the fact that, for years, black LGBT people have existed unapologetically and triumphed in the face of adversity – and will continue to.

---

**(1)** National Black Justice Coalition, National Center for Transgender Equality, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. “Injustice at Every Turn: A Look at Black Respondents in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey.” (2011): <http://nbcj.org/sites/default/files/trans-adjustment-web.pdf>.

**(2)** Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). “Shared Differences: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students of Color in our Nation’s Schools.” (2009): <http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/Shared%20Differences.pdf>.

**(3)** Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, Center for American Progress. “LGBT Families of Color: Facts at a Glance.” (2012): <http://www.lgbtmap.org/file/lgbt-families-of-color-facts-at-a-glance.pdf>.

# DISCUSSION GUIDE | CAMPUS

---

What touched you personally about the film?

Which of the people in the film did you relate to the most? Why?

Did anything in the film surprise you? How so?

Often the black community is portrayed as monolithically homophobic and the LGBT community as entirely white. Why is highlighting the diversity of both communities so important?

What does the film reveal about the black church's response to the LGBT civil rights movement, and how does it further reveal the complexity of the black community's thoughts on their own experience of oppression?

How has the issue of family played into the black church's defense of "traditional marriage?"

What similarities or differences did you notice between the families depicted in the film and your own family?

Both Samantha and Karess had a difficult time coming out or being outed to their families. Are you out to your family? Why or why not? What resources have either helped you or would help you in your coming out journey?

If you are an LGBT ally, how might you offer support to a friend or loved one in the process of coming out?

What role do young people play in shaping attitudes around LGBT acceptance and LGBT-inclusive policy? What are some ways college students can get involved?

"I knew that white people were using their influence to buy my influence with the black church to advance their anti-gay agenda," Rev. Carlton Pearson, an ex-fundamentalist minister, explains. "We bought into it." In what ways did the film challenge or confirm your ideas about the right-wing strategy to drive a wedge between the African-American and LGBT communities?

How might black LGBT people feel marginalized by both communities? How might they reconcile the struggle in loyalty between the two?

Is the LGBT civil rights movement akin to the African-American struggle for civil rights? Can the two be compared or are they different movements with differing goals?

What were some effective community organizing strategies utilized by marriage equality campaigners in the film? How can you utilize these strategies on your campus to mobilize students?

How have you seen the LGBT and student of color groups work together effectively on your campus? Where are there divisions? What are your suggestions to build better alliances?

# DISCUSSION GUIDE | CAMPUS CONTINUED

---

What lessons can white and straight allies take from the documentary and use for coalition-building?

Recently, the U.S. Supreme Court simultaneously ruled DOMA and key provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act unconstitutional. Do these seem like contradictory rulings? Why or why not? What implications do these decisions hold for the future of equality and civil rights for all people?

# GLOSSARY

---

**Ally** A person who is a member of the dominant group who works to end oppression in his or her own personal and professional life by supporting and advocating for the oppressed population.

**Bisexual, Bi** An individual who is physically, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to men and women. Bisexuals need not have had sexual experience with both men and women; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all to identify as bisexual.

**Cisgender** A person whose gender identity and expression matches the gender typically associated with their biological sex. For example: a female who identifies as a woman.

**Civil Union** State-based relationship recognition for gay and lesbian couples that offers some or all of the state (though none of the federal) rights, protections and responsibilities of marriage.

**Closeted** A person who is not open about his or her sexual orientation.

**Coming Out** A lifelong process of self-acceptance. People forge a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender identity first to themselves and then may reveal it to others. Publicly identifying one's orientation or gender identity may or may not be part of coming out.

**Gay** The adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, lesbian (n. or adj.) is often a preferred term for women. Avoid identifying gay people as "homosexuals," an outdated term considered derogatory and offensive to many lesbian and gay people.

**Gender Expression** The ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice and emphasizing, de-emphasizing or changing their body's characteristics. Gender expression is not necessarily an indication of sexual orientation.

**Gender Identity** The sense of "being" male or "being" female. For some people, gender identity is in accord with physical anatomy. For transgender people, gender identity may differ from physical anatomy or expected social roles. It is important to note that gender identity, biological sex, and sexual orientation are not necessarily linked.

**Heterosexual** An adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex. Also straight.

**Homosexual** Outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive by many gay and lesbian people. The Associated Press, *New York Times* and *Washington Post* restrict usage of the term. Gay and/or lesbian accurately describe those who are attracted to people of the same sex.

**Homophobia** Fear of lesbians and gay men. Prejudice is usually a more accurate description of hatred or antipathy toward LGBT people.

# GLOSSARY CONTINUED

---

**Lesbian** A woman whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction is to other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay (adj.) or as gay women. Avoid identifying lesbians as “homosexuals,” a derogatory term.

**LGBT / GLBT** Acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.” LGBT and/or GLBT are often used because they are more inclusive of the diversity of the community. Care should be taken to ensure that audiences are not confused by their use.

**Lifestyle** Inaccurate term used by anti-gay extremists to denigrate lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lives. As there is no one straight lifestyle, there is no one lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender lifestyle.

**Outing** The act of publicly declaring (sometimes based on rumor and/or speculation) or revealing another person’s sexual orientation or gender identity without that person’s consent. Considered inappropriate by a large portion of the LGBT community.

**People of Color (POC)** A catch-all term for all non-white people or people not of predominantly European ancestry.

**Queer** Traditionally a pejorative term, queer has been appropriated by some LGBT people to describe themselves. However, it is not universally accepted within the LGBT community and should be avoided unless quoting or describing someone who self-identifies that way.

**Same Gender Loving (SGL)** A term coined for African-American use by activist Cleo Manago, is a description for lesbian, gay, and bisexual men and women, particularly in the African-American community. It emerged in the early 1990s as a black culturally affirming LGBT identity.

**Sexual Orientation** (also **Orientation**) The scientifically accurate term for an individual’s enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual (straight) orientations. Avoid the offensive term “sexual preference,” which is used to suggest that being gay or lesbian is voluntary and therefore “curable.”

*Sources: GLAAD Media Reference Guide and University of Michigan*

# FAQS

---

## **What is Tugg?**

Tugg is a web-based platform that lets you bring the movies you want to your local theater.

## **How does Tugg work?**

It's pretty simple: Become a "promoter" by requesting a title from the Tugg library of films and provide your preferred event details. Set up your event with the help of a Tugg representative. Spread the word to your friends and community and encourage them to buy tickets. Get enough people to reserve their tickets and meet the ticket threshold in order to confirm your event. Sit back and enjoy the show!

## **Is Tugg available in all parts of the country?**

Yes. Their exhibitor network includes thousands of screens all across the country. And if they're not currently working with your local theater, they'll do their best to get the theater on board so that you can host Tugg events in your town.

## **Do I need to create an account in order to attend an event?**

Nope.

## **What happens if the ticket threshold isn't reached?**

If the threshold isn't met, then the event is called off. Attendees are notified that the screening is canceled and their credit cards won't be charged. Promoters can contact *The New Black* to explore other options to host a screening of the film. For more information, email [screenings@newblackfilm.com](mailto:screenings@newblackfilm.com).

## **How will I know if an event I'm attending meets its threshold?**

You will receive a notification that the event has been confirmed and your tickets will be emailed to you.

## **Can I buy my tickets at the theater on the day of the event?**

Sometimes you can, but it depends on which theater is hosting the event. Some theaters sell tickets for Tugg events while others don't. It's always better to buy your tickets online through the event page – that way you'll be assured beforehand that you can get in!

## **When I purchase a ticket for an event on Tugg, is my credit card immediately charged?**

No, your money is not withdrawn until the event reaches the threshold of required attendees. Once that threshold is met, your credit card is charged and your ticket is reserved. If the threshold isn't met by the deadline, the event is canceled and your card is not charged.

## **Can I pick up my tickets at the theater?**

No, you must print out your tickets before arriving at the theater or be able to show your ticket on your phone. If you can't locate your ticket in your email inbox, contact [support@tugginc.com](mailto:support@tugginc.com) and they will send you a new ticket.

## **I would like to organize a panel discussion after the screening. Will I be able to use the theater for this?**

Yes. Tugg will hold the theater for 30 minutes after the movie ends – plenty of time to delve into a discussion with the audience or a small panel.

# FAQS CONTINUED

---

## **How do I find panelists for my post-screening discussion?**

We recommend reaching out to your local LGBT center or community group. A quick Google search for “LGBT” and your city/state should bring up some options. If there isn’t an LGBT-specific organization in your community, there are various national groups that may be able to help you with your efforts: National Black Justice Coalition ([nbjc.org](http://nbjc.org)), Human Rights Campaign ([hrc.org](http://hrc.org)), National Gay and Lesbian Task Force ([taskforce.org](http://taskforce.org)) and GLAAD ([glaad.org](http://glaad.org)) are just a few.

## **Do I have to host a screening on National Coming Out Day?**

No. *The New Black’s* partnership with Tugg officially kicks off on National Coming Out Day, but individuals and groups are able to host screenings before and after National Coming Out Day (October 11). We are only encouraging participants to host a screening on National Coming Out Day as an act of solidarity and a way to collectively commemorate the annual event.

## **Can I host a screening at another community space instead of a local theater?**

Yes. While our partnership with Tugg specifically enables individuals and organizations to host screenings at their neighborhood movie theaters at no cost, there are other options to bring a screening to your school or community group. For more information, email [screenings@newblackfilm.com](mailto:screenings@newblackfilm.com).