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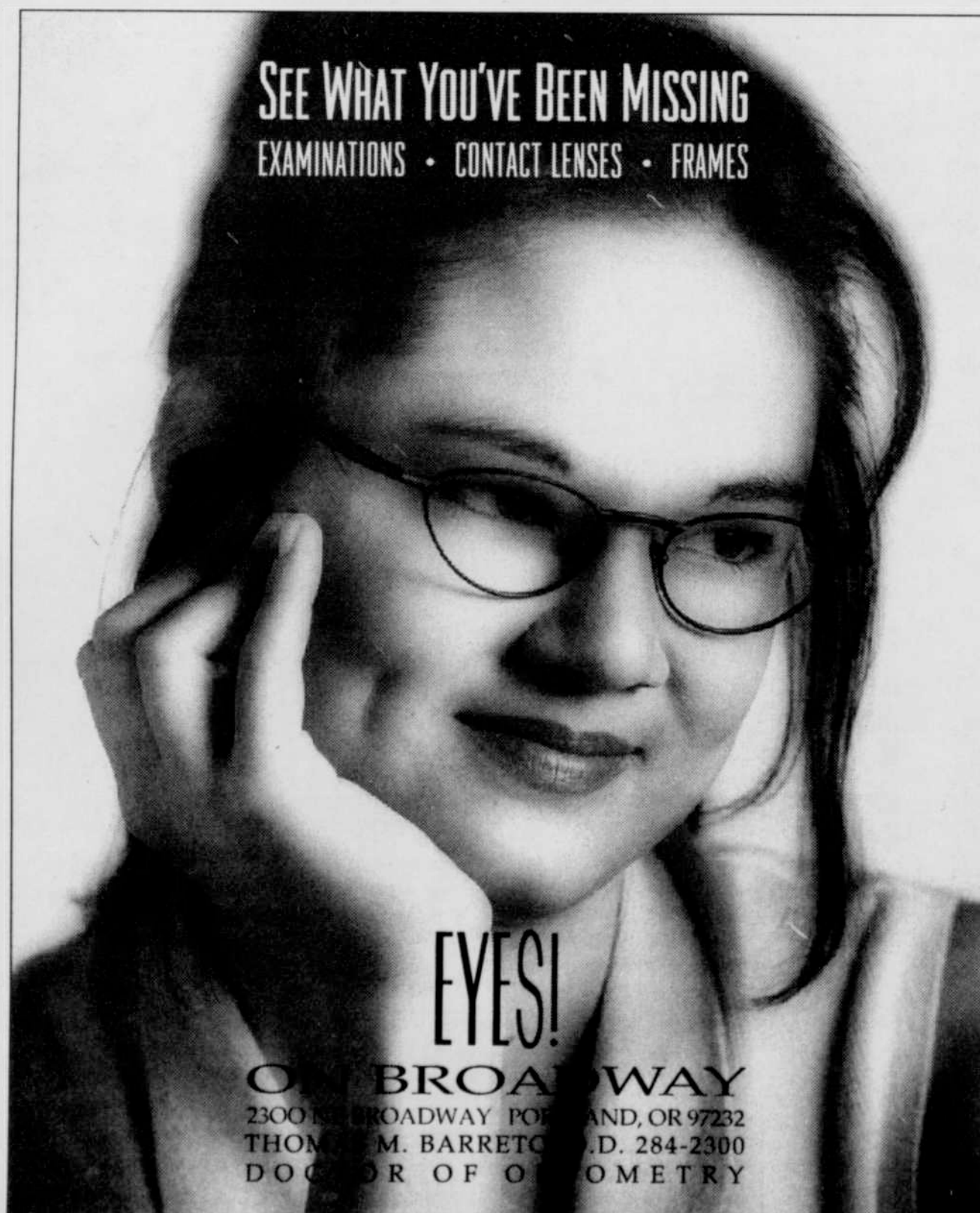
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NATIONAL news

LEADERS CONDEMN ADS

**Sexual minority religious community denounces
religious right wing's anti-gay ad campaign** by Bob Roehr

The queer and queer-friendly religious community responded to an anti-gay media blitz launched in mid-July by a coalition of conservative organizations. Gay and lesbian religious leaders spoke out at a July 24 media briefing in Washington, D.C.

The press conference came during the two-day National Religious Leadership Roundtable that brought together more than 30 such leaders. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force organized the gathering.

"We share with each other a passionate commitment to defend and promote the inherent worth and dignity of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people, to proclaim loudly that we are all God's people, worthy of God's love, acceptance and blessing," said the Rev. Meg Riley, director of the Office for Faith in Action of the Unitarian Universalist Association. "We

that must be shed in order to get to heaven. ...It is clear why we must speak out."

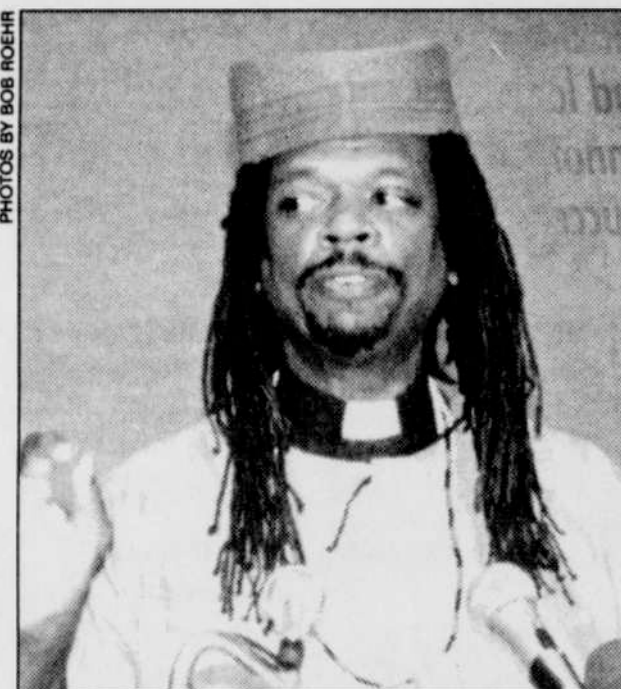
He said the three main branches of Judaism support full civil equality for gay men and lesbians.

Marjorie J. Hill, national president of the Unity Fellowship Church Movement, said she was appalled and saddened by the misguided messages promoted via the ad campaign.

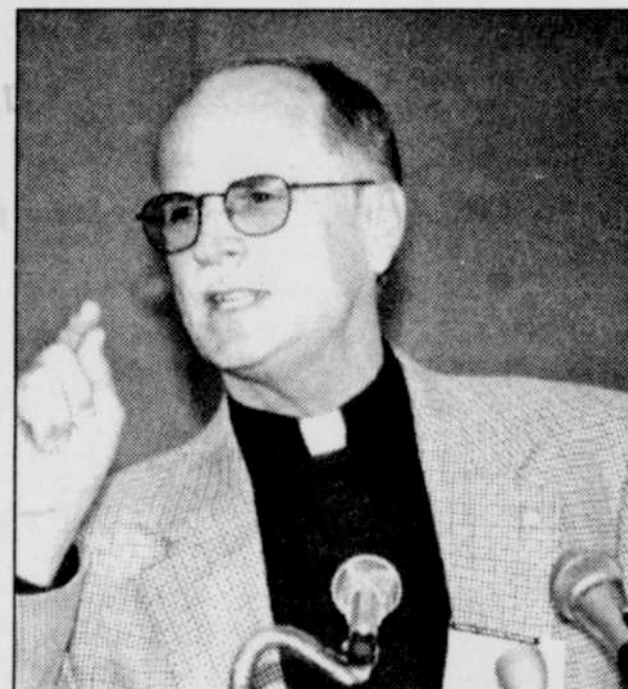
A practicing psychologist for the past 20 years, Hill quoted from an American Psychological Association statement: "Humans can not choose to be straight or gay. ...Psychologists do not consider sexual orientation to be a conscious choice that can be voluntarily made."

She then urged people to "choose science over ignorance, freedom over fear, and acceptance over bias."

The Rev. Kwabena Rainey Cheeks, pastor of



The Rev. Kwabena Rainey Cheeks



The Rev. Mel White

have been too frequently silent about this commitment. Many of us have been too busy ministering to those in pain because of religion being used against them as a weapon."

A week before the briefing, some religious conservatives sponsored a series of national newspaper ads which urged gay men and lesbians to leave their homosexuality behind and "let the real healing begin."

The ads, which appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *USA Today*, were sponsored by such groups as the Christian Coalition and the Family Research Council.

The ads cited thousands of "ex-gays" as proof that gay men and lesbians are capable of "leaving their homosexual identity for sexual celibacy, and even marriage."

They also praised Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., and football player Reggie White—both of whom have denounced homosexuality as a sin—for speaking "the truth" in the face of criticism.

Lee Walzer, vice president of the World Congress of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Jewish Organizations, was among the sexual minority religious figures to denounce the campaign.

"I speak both as a gay man and a Jew, a member of two groups that share an unfortunate history of stigmatization as sinners, as deviants, as Other," he said at the briefing. "As Jews, we too have been told that God does not hear our prayers. We too have been told that God does not love us as we are. We too have been the target of conversion campaigns, made in the name of love and compassion for us. We too have seen our faith called a stubborn, rebellious choice

the Inner Light Unity Fellowship Church in Washington, D.C., echoed that sentiment.

"Religious people told my ancestors that they could not be free," he said. "Once, religious people told women that they could not be free. Now the same religious people here in America are trying to say that because they don't agree with who someone may dare to love, that they shall not be free."

"I truly understand that no one is free until we are all free. I can no more change the color of my sexual orientation than I can change the color of my skin."

The Rev. Mel White, minister of justice for the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, drew upon his own 35-year struggle to deny his homosexuality. He called ex-gay therapies "about as useful as leeches and lobotomies to the men and women who struggle desperately" with their sexuality.

During the press conference, ex-gay Anthony Falzarano, director of Transformation Christian Ministries, stood up and argued the speakers did not represent their respective denominations.

One by one the speakers came to the podium and refuted the charges. They outlined basic policies of inclusion and admitted to ongoing controversies over issues such as ordination of clergy and same-sex marriage.

"You are ex-gay? God bless you," said Cheeks. "The God I serve is large enough to embrace us all. ...If your God is not large enough to make someone gay or lesbian, my God is. My God is so big that it embraces all of us."