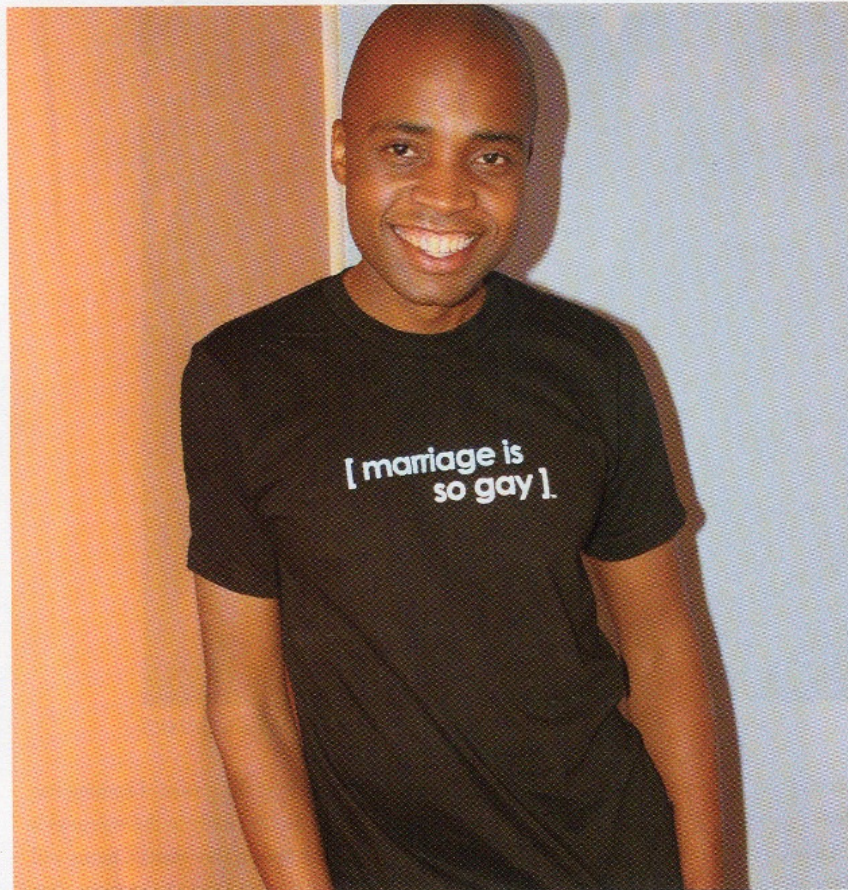


T-shirts That Are 'So Gay!'

Out Yale grad and his two straight friends take on marriage with whimsical apparel that carries a serious message for equality

BY STEFANIE TUDER



Reggie Solomon models his T-shirt creation

In December, Reggie Solomon, a recent Yale graduate, was able to send his first check to Connecticut's gay marriage advocacy group, Love Makes a Family for \$200. It's a great start for an average gay guy with an inspired idea. When Solomon, and his two straight friends, Ben Berkowitz and Andy Horowitz, teasingly came up with a T-shirt concept last year, they immediately realized its potential and ran with it. Issogay, the company the three friends subsequently founded, has grown into a successful business with clients from all over the world.

Their idea was simple: create a T-shirt with the slogan "Marriage is so gay." Inspired by a Human Rights Campaign (HRC) bumper sticker during a car ride together, Solomon, Berkowitz and Horowitz carried the idea of

simplicity throughout their concept with a plain black American Apparel shirt and two-toned writing.

"We were driving up to Martha's Vineyard and one of my friends asked what was that sign they saw on a few bumper stickers," says Solomon. It was the HRC symbol, Reggie, an active member of the gay community, explained to his straight friend. The discussion later prompted one of them to joke, "Marriage is so gay."

"We thought, 'Well that's a great message!'" says Solomon. They quickly formed a company, designed their product and put it for sale locally and on the Internet. Soon, friends and folks from as far away as Australia began sending in orders.

Solomon attributes the shirt's popularity to its lighthearted message. "The shirt strikes a balance between playfulness and seriousness that resonates with people," he says. "It's a great way to be supportive of marriage equality while still being fashionable."

The shirt is so current that people of all sexual orientations choose to wear it. A lot of Solomon's straight friends have already bought and worn the T-shirt, and are even using it as wedding gifts. For progressive parents with activist toddlers, the three friends recently launched a baby onesie.

To date, Solomon has not heard of any negative reactions to the T-shirt. "No one's mentioned anything, but I don't ask them what reactions they get from other clothes, either," he says. If anything, Solomon receives excitement from people who see the T-shirt. "I was once wearing the shirt and someone asked me where they could get one. I was like, 'I'm so glad you asked!'" he says.

As for the future, Solomon says he only dreams big. "We'd love to think about doing some more T-shirts ... whenever the idea hits us. Right now we have a big interest in sustainable foods and green-type interests," he says.

The trio is also planning to throw a party when 100,000 shirts are sold; they have currently sold 152. "We're not close to the party, but my friends and I are not people to dream small. We're not dreaming small for marriage, so we're not going to dream small for the T-shirt," Solomon says.

At the end of the day, Solomon says he is glad to have learned so much. "We didn't get into this to make profit. We give 20% of the profits from the sale of each T-shirt to organizations that support marriage equality," he says. "The T-shirt feels good to wear on the soul and it feels good to wear on the skin, so we're very happy with it."

Issogay T-shirts and onesies can be purchased at www.issogay.com for \$20 to benefit Love Makes a Family CT, Marriage Equality USA or the Human Rights Campaign.