



Friday Forum: Is the Gay Community Racist?

January 9, 2009

Editor's Note: We're launching a new feature today at Queerty. Each Friday, we're inviting you to be the pundit on a hot-button question facing the LGBT community and its allies. As always, we expect people to be respectful and considerate of others by refraining from personal attacks. We present the information, you make the decision.

A study released this week by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force by researchers at NYU and Hunter College shows that the original numbers for the African-American vote on Prop 8. were wrong. Rather than an overwhelming 70%, it's really more like 58%.

Yet, in the immediate aftermath of Prop. 8, reaction to the news ranged from bewilderment, anger and frustration to a committed, but sometimes patronizing call to "help educate black voters." Is the rush to judgment a sign that the LGBT community is all-too-willing to blame someone besides themselves for their defeat instead of taking responsibility for its own failures? Or are the calls being made now to reach out to the African-American community a sign that the gay community is recognizing its failures to embrace people of color?

Is the gay community racist? Is the *white* gay community racist? And if so, what to do about it?

The *San Francisco Chronicle* offers more information on the study:

"That support among blacks is still well above the 52 percent Prop. 8 received from all voters in the Nov. 4 election. Much of that can be attributed to the strong religious tradition in the black community, where 57 percent of African American voters attend church at least once a week, compared with 42 percent of Californians overall.

"The study debunks the myth that African Americans overwhelmingly and disproportionately supported Proposition 8," Andrea Shorter, director of And Marriage for All, said in a statement. "But we clearly have work to do with, within and for African American communities, particularly the black church."

Religious voters were among the leaders in the pro-Prop. 8 efforts, with 70 percent of weekly churchgoers backing the same-sex marriage ban. Among voters who hardly ever attended religious services, only 30 percent voted for Prop. 8.

"This is a wake-up call to the (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community," said Jaime Grant, director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute. "We must do a better job of organizing in the faith-based community, using LGBT people who are themselves part of that community."

But Frank Schubert, political consultant for the Prop. 8 campaign, doesn't believe that more outreach to minority communities or religious groups would have changed the election result.

"The problem is not that they didn't reach out to those communities, but that those communities didn't agree with them," he said."

*A word about the image. It comes from Wandering Caravan, whose author puts it in context:

"The above is circa 1950 and is from Tunisia. The cartoon represents the gay colonial /gay traveller's desires of being ravaged by "dark peoples" in North Africa. Though circa 1950, the idea, the desire displayed, remains a major fixture within larger gay culture where stereotyped fantasies of Afro Diasporic men coupled with a member of the larger gay community is a never abating staple."