



BLAMING BLACKS FOR WHITE BEHAVIOR: STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT GAY CLAIMS

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To themselves, the country and the world, many Whites are in the midst of some serious self-congratulatory posturing and projection, claiming a change not yet achieved, a move from racism in no ways real, and a political maturity which their 43% vote for Obama does not seem to suggest. And in the corners and contours of every triumphant conversation they have are subtle and gross traces of arrogant attempts to reverse roles with Black people and play the moral and social critic of Black behavior. But in reality, their positions of power, privilege and continued dominance, in spite of elections won or lost, do not give them the moral ground, empathetic understanding or cultural insight required to assume this role.

Indeed, there's something obscene about members of a ruling race/class lecturing an oppressed people on its ethical understanding and assertion in the world. This is where Marvin comes in talking about things that "make you wanna holla, throw up both yo' hands". And it's where some of us, like Langston Hughes, explain it as just "the ways of White folks", i.e., the almost unconscious arrogance, the culturally constricted conception of others and the routine denial of the deep injury and violence all dominance carries within it.

So, it does not dawn on those White gays speaking from a new sense of power and status among their heterosexual White brothers and sisters that their bogus claims against Black people for "losing their election" is not only false, but reflective of a racist conception of Africans and themselves. And this yields a built-in collective indictment of us and an enshrined exoneration of them—gay, straight, bisexual, transgendered or still to be decided. Whatever its various forms and pathological phases, the will to White dominance is also

marked by the tendency to find fault and defect in others while nursing deep-rooted addiction to denial about the problems within themselves and the problems they pose for others in this country as well as the world.

If we're going to talk race, in spite of claims to the contrary, there's no need to blame history and hell fire on Blacks. Whites, gay and straight, should accept responsibility for their own acts and ideas. White people conceived, promoted and passed Proposition 8 which prohibits gay marriage. They represent 63% of the voters of California, Blacks only 6-10%, and thus they had the votes to pass it or defeat it. Even in San Francisco, only about a half of the voters turned out.

But if we want to move beyond racial indictment, a brief look at the statistics suggest the complexity of the issue and of the views of the voting groups that supported Proposition 8 by large percentages. They included: married persons—60%; seniors, 65+—61 %; non-college graduates—58%; parents of minor children—64%; conservatives—85%; Republicans—82%; Protestants—65%; Catholics—64%; and White Evangelicals—81%.

Figures on Jewish voters were not given in the National Election Poll from which these percentages are taken. But the Orthodox Jewish community issued a strong statement in support of Prop. 8 and joined the Mormons in their campaign against it. In fact, the Rabbinical Council of California and the Orthodox Union gave the same reason that those Black churches and Christians, in general, gave who voted for Prop. 8, that it was a matter of faith and family. Reformed and Conservative Jewish leaders, like liberal and progressive Black leaders and persons, opposed Proposition 8, but Orthodox leaders praised and pushed it as a constitutional protection of the biblical definition of marriage. So if we wanted to pursue

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a more sound analysis of the election results, we could easily have asked why did all these people who voted in large percentages for Proposition 8 do so, instead of the counterproductive “White gays gone wild” approach towards Blacks.

But of course, it’s always easier in a racist context, which hides its demons and damage to others from itself, to blame the most vulnerable. Black voters, according to the polls, did vote 70% for the proposition; Latino voters 53%, and Asian voters 49%, but other groups voted in higher numbers, especially other White folks. Thus, the need for below-the-surface thinking that searches beyond the deceptive appearances and easy answers racism is ever ready to supply.

There is at least now a growing call among gay activists for some sober assessment about the election results. Jasmyne Canning, our sister-in-struggle, gay activist and fellow columnist has made such a call for White gays especially to put away their racial knives and nasty talk, stop the thumpin’ and thuggin’ on us and think seriously about mistakes made and other paths possible to engage the issue and build coalitions and alliances of reciprocity and mutual respect. This includes recognizing the success of the organizing and arguments of the religious right—Christian and Jewish, and the failure of the gay movement to outreach sufficiently; to come out and vote strongly itself; to engage thoroughly its youthful activists; and to donate adequately and similarly as the opposition.

Whites—gay or straight—cannot come to us as teachers and tutors, playing scenes from out of some movie in their minds about White rescue and redemption. Nor can they define for us what is progressive and problematic; right or wrong and impose their will on us. Our culture is too ancient, rich and resourceful for that; our experiences too instructive and our moral commitment to self-determination too strong and essential to our struggle to free ourselves from all forms of domination, deprivation and degradation.

White gays must see the moral and political contradiction in expecting Blacks to be automatic allies and in feeling no need or having no knowledge of how to engage them. They can’t indict us and expect us to be sensitive to the issues they define as important; nor can they monopolize resources for HIV/AIDS and not share them equitably and expect us not see this as a measure of what they actually think of us, our lives and well-being as a people.

Finally, although this is difficult for hardliners to accept, one can be progressive, like Obama and others, and oppose Proposition 8 and still maintain marriage is between a man and a woman. The critical issues revolve around rights, recognition and redefinition and each must be engaged in its own terms. But we owe it to ourselves and others to start all discussions with the unqualified and uncontested ethical understanding of our ancestors that *all* humans are bearers of dignity and divinity, deserving the highest respect.

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