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**SCLC Fight Against Gay Marriage A No Win Situation  
Unapologetically Young, Black and Female  
By Jasmyne A. Cannick  
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Who's pulling the strings?

Fact. On any given day I can open up any one of most read daily newspapers and never once read anything about a Black civil rights group, that is, until one of those groups does something perceived as anti-gay and then its front page news.

As is the case with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and they're now very public battle with their Los Angeles chapter head Reverend Eric Lee over his support of gay marriage.

At first, all of this took me by surprise. The SCLC nationally is not one of the most vocal or active civil rights groups these days. I mean the average age of an SCLC board member is somewhere around 65, and that's being nice. And while I am not sure if that says more about the SCLC's willingness to embrace young Blacks or young Blacks willingness to get involved, it is what it is.

Add to that, the last time I checked, after 40 years, the SCLC's advocacy work around pushing for legislation that guarantees employment, income, and housing for the nation's economically challenged, i.e. Blacks, wasn't even close to being realized. I'm just saying.

So you can imagine that I was more than a little perplexed at hearing the SCLC's leadership has threatened to suspend or remove Rev. Lee as head of their Los Angeles chapter because of his outspoken support for gay marriage. Gay marriage, really? Which leads me to ask the question, does the SCLC's leadership even know where Los

Angeles is?

Rev. Lee knew very well that the leadership of the SCLC, comprised mostly of Black Southern ministers, was not in support of gay marriage, as did his white gay supporters. In Lee's defense, it would have been organizational suicide not to support gay marriage. While I don't necessarily agree with all of Rev. Lee's tactics over the past year as it relates to the issue of gay marriage and Proposition 8, California's gay marriage ban, that has seen Lee become the Black poster child for white gays in California, I will say that he knows the art of survival. This is Los Angeles, not the Deep South and the white gays here have very cunningly all but made it mandatory that Black civil rights groups embrace gay marriage, lest their funding be jeopardized and they find themselves on the front page of the Los Angeles Times under a not so flattering headline. Right or wrong, Lee knows this as do the leaders of the local NAACP, Urban League, and every Black elected official in the State of California.

Which leads me to this. Just whose getting played here?

The SCLC's leadership thinks that by threatening to remove gay-friendly Rev. Lee from heading the Los Angeles chapter that it's flexing its organizational muscles and keeping control over the organization. An organization that on any given day doesn't make the national news, and then when it does, it's under the banner of being homophobic. So in reality the SCLC is aiding in its own implosion and eventual destruction, which this conspiracy theorist believes is really the goal of the gay marriage movement. Because as we all know, if you aren't with them, you're against them.

Now I support gay marriage, but what I don't support are using COINTELPRO like tactics and strategies that by hook or by crook force Black people by loss of organizational funding, in-fighting, and negative press to support gay marriage. This is not how we move a nation forward on the issue and only continues to add to the backlash faced by the gay community from Blacks.

Polling data still finds that a large majority of Blacks support banning gay marriage, and not just in California.

On the flipside, the SCLC's leadership would do itself a world of good to just drop the whole idea of removing Lee. It's a no win situation. If Lee is removed, the SCLC will be labeled nationally as a homophobic. As poor as the SCLC is and in these hard economic times, I don't think the SCLC could stand to lose what little corporate sponsorship they have left because they are now viewed as homophobic. And if they think that Black people's membership dues to the group will sustain them, they better think again.

There's an old Jamaican proverb that goes something like, "we run tings, tings nuh run we."

Our organizations need to stop focusing on issues that we have no control over and that do not affect our pocketbook and quality of life in the least bit and shift that energy into addressing the issues that do affect all of us and that we can control.

The SCLC's leadership and Rev. Lee would do well to remember it and not become pawns in a game played by people who at the end of the day have never had the best interest of Blacks at heart.


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
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