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**What Blacks Can Learn From Gays
Unapologetically Young, Black and Female
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Before you open that bottle of champagne, can of beer, or bottle of Hennessy in celebration of last week's decision by the California Supreme Court upholding Proposition 8 and the ban on gay marriage, did you ever stop to think maybe the jokes on us?

I mean think about it. Last November, Blacks voted overwhelmingly in support of Proposition 8, ensuring that lesbian and gay couples, *including Black couples*, continue to be treated as second-class citizens. Everyone had an opinion from the tennis courts to the pulpit. And no matter whether Black support of Proposition 8 had more to do with religious beliefs or just plain old fashioned homophobia, the fact still remains that two people getting married, same-sex or not, has no financial impact whatsoever on the rest of us. None. We may not like it, but at the end of the day, gay marriage doesn't take food from anyone's mouth, clothes off of anyone's back, or a roof from over someone's head. But judging from the way we acted, you would have thought that it did.

Flash forward and California finds itself in the middle of a never-ending fiscal nightmare. A nightmare that has Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger threatening to put vital programs, including health insurance for the poor, financial help for unemployed single mothers, and a State program that provides antiviral drugs for people living with AIDS, on the chopping block, to close a \$24.3-billion budget deficit. Cuts that will surely have the hardest impact on Blacks living at or below the poverty line in California. Cuts that *will* take food from someone's mouth, clothes off someone's back, and a roof from over someone's head and yet with us, it's business as usual.

Which leaves me to question if Blacks are more concerned about whether two men or women commit to loving and caring for each other than they are about cuts to vital programs that affect all of us? Because let me tell you, me getting married tomorrow isn't nearly going to have the same impact on Black California as hundreds of thousands of out of work, hungry, and homeless Black people are. You think crime is bad now, you just wait and see. Message!

Lest I forget to mention that our support of Proposition 8 only ensured that gay organizations fighting for marriage continue to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars to keep the fight going, while many Black organizations are operating on the brink of bankruptcy. Message!

Now I'm the first to admit as a Black lesbian that there wasn't too much about the "No on Prop 8" campaign that I liked. It was a poorly run campaign predicated on the premise that because we're Black (in my case Black and gay) and benefited from the Civil Rights Movement that by osmosis we'd oppose the measure. My no vote on Proposition 8 had absolutely nothing to do with "No on 8s" campaign. Yet and still, whether I like it or not, I have to give props where props are due to the gays for being able to do something that Blacks haven't. Make the issue of gay marriage an issue for everyone, including President Barack Obama.

Just six months into his term and gays "called out" President Obama during a recent trip to California. Angry because of the Courts decision to uphold Proposition 8, the gay community reminded the President of his promise to support equality for gays and their support of his candidacy after their beloved then Senator Hillary Clinton was no longer an option. Even though both Clinton and President Obama have made it painstakingly clear that they support civil unions over marriage for gays, the gay community made it clear that it is not going to take no for an answer. A message, I guarantee you the President heard loud and clear.

I wonder if Blacks would ever think of protesting their first Black President to make sure that he addressed issues relevant not only to middle class Americans but to those Americans living at or below the poverty line. I'm just saying, while I don't always agree with the gay community's tactics, they sure do know how to make their voice heard. Message!

With all the issues facing Black Californians today - home foreclosures, unemployment, homelessness - gay marriage remains at the forefront of the Democratic agenda for Black elected officials and that's not by accident. This is thanks mainly in part to a gangster-like mentality that dictates either you're with us or against us and if you're against us there are consequences. Consequences that include withholding political contributions and endorsements of Black candidates, this even though the majority of white gays do not live in districts represented by African-Americans and could care less about the issues that are most important to the Blacks who do. This is evident by the gay community's refusal to address any other issue besides gay marriage. Even though, just as all Blacks aren't heterosexual and homophobic, all gays aren't white and concerned with marriage. Message!

And while many of our Black churches were so instrumental in making sure that their

congregations supported Proposition 8, I can't say that the same energy has been put into making sure that we're aware of the impact by the Governor's proposed budget cuts on Blacks in California.

So I'll say it again, maybe the joke is on us. Because even though the Courts upheld Proposition 8, it's not white affluent gays by and large who are unemployed, with homes in foreclosure, living at or below the poverty line, it's us. It's us who are stressing out over the rent and the bills while making the liquor store owners and the State richer with every bottle of Hennessy and lottery ticket bought.

I don't confess to being the best at keeping it pretty, it is what it is. And what it is, is that Blacks' support in denying gays the right to get married isn't going to make gays heterosexual or force them to stop having sex with each other - nor is it going to guarantee Blacks who supported Proposition 8 their passage into heaven. There ain't no law that will ever be able to legislate or guarantee that. In the meantime, our support of non-relevant issues like Proposition 8, while ignoring the real issues that affect us all, will ensure that Blacks continue to be at the bottom of the food chain in California - even with a Black President in Office.

Black people 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 - starting with the Governor and the Legislature. We can start by adopting the same gangster-like mentality that the gays have taken on - either the Government and elected officials are with us or against us and if they're against us, there should be consequences - not re-elections and passes.


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BlackCommentator.com Columnist, *Jasmyne Cannick*, is a critic and commentator based in Los Angeles who writes about the worlds of pop culture, race, class, and politics as it relates to the African-American community. Her work has been featured in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Daily News*, and *Ebony Magazine*. A regular contributor to NPR, she was chosen as one *Essence Magazine's* 25 Women Shaping the World. Click [here](#) to contact Ms. Cannick.

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