

Re-electing President Obama Trumps Black Resistance to Same Sex Marriage



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For the last few weeks since President Obama became the first sitting president to endorse same-sex marriage, pundits have been obsessed with what this support will mean for this year's election. Specifically, will Obama's rock-solid support in the black community waiver?

Of course, this obsession is predicated on the false belief by nearly everyone in the media that African Americans are somehow more homophobic than other ethnic groups. However, how exactly African Americans feel about homosexuality and why has rarely been investigated.

Yet, when fire and brimstone preachers like Eddie Long or James David Manning surface, they are often treated as poster children for African-American attitudes on homosexuality. Since Long's "homosexual" scandal, many of us now realize or suspect that the minister was talking out of both sides of his neck. A closer look will reveal that the very "manly," and "strong black male" image that Long promoted is really just another example of the conflict between masculinity and homosexuality frequent in African-American communities.

But we must remember that this conflict is not an independent, African-American phenomenon, but the outcome of a history of brutal attacks on African-American males from slavery all the way up to now with what recently happened to young Trayvon Martin in Florida even. Disproportionately, African American

males have been under deadly, compromising or stigmatizing siege for centuries. The list of “accidentally” killed, harmless, African-American males is almost endless.

As a result of this constant trauma, African Americans are deeply concerned about the “state of African-American males” and about Black men’s capacity to be “real men” in a society where their lives can be forfeit at any time. There has been a litany of African-American personalities, once including Rev. Al Sharpton, involved in a reactionary “Black male resurrection” campaign to justifiably compensate for what has and does destructively happen to the African American male. Notables like Minister Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam (NOI) – in the recent past – have been hard-core proponents of African American males being “strong” and “not homosexual” – though his views have softened somewhat over the past few years.

But, what the pundits don’t seem to understand is that African American’s desire to see Obama win a second term trumps any feelings that African Americans may have about same-sex marriage. And it does so because African Americans, like all Americans, have priorities. Even if some African Americans have concerns about same-sex marriage, we are more concerned about the record unemployment, the high rates of incarceration, and large numbers of Black people without health care in our communities.

We also understand the important symbolic role that President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama play in the lives of African Americans. African Americans (and all Americans) are now living in an era once unimaginable because of America’s history of, and continuing struggles with, racism. But it did happen. The U.S. does have a Black first family, and many African Americans (and others) are not willing to give that up and want to savor and experience this for as long as possible.

One of the rarely articulated benefits to the Black community

of the Obamas being in the White House is that they symbolically defy the perception and once believed idea of absolute limitation – in terms of possibility – among African Americans. Obama, in particular, is a daily reminder of Black male greatness that will have enduring impact on Black boys for generations to come. “I can be president” is now a thought that does reverberate within African-American minds. That is incredibly valuable to African Americans even if they object to his support for same-sex marriage.

That Obama is a symbol that assuages and soothes some of that male insecurity that fuels a lot of the anti-homosexual sentiment in the Black community is important. The conversations that were had in the Black community after his announcement are important. But even though this isn't a deal-breaker for African Americans, we shouldn't think that the work of dealing with Black male trauma, black manhood insecurity, and anti-homosexual sentiments is over. Obama is an important symbol, but he's just that, a symbol.

We should remember that not all African Americans are politically naive or stupid. Despite any blunders Obama may have made in his first four years, few of them have been significant enough for most African Americans to let him go. We know that he has more on his agenda that he wants to get done and much of that agenda could benefit us.

And we know what the alternative is. Another white man who wants to destroy everything that has been built during the last century to help African Americans and others move up the economic ladder. African Americans have always been socially conservative and politically progressive. That wouldn't change now. Certainly not because President Obama endorsed same-sex marriage.