

Written by Hazel Rice Edney
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Why is it that with the Black jobless rate astronomically high, schools crumbling in Black neighborhoods, low test scores and dropout rates plaguing Black children and home foreclosures, incarceration, death and disease soaring in Black communities, why is it that some Black people are saying they will not go to the voting polls because President Barack Obama agrees with same-sex marriage?

That is the question that brought the Rev. Jesse Jackson to tears on Saturday, Sept. 22, during a forum at the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Legislative Conference. The question also riles the Rev. Al Sharpton, who believes some people are actually being paid to advocate staying home on Nov. 6.

Rev. Jackson used a handkerchief to wipe away tears as he sat on the panel at the Saturday morning brunch, recalling how he was jailed on July 6, 1960 for trying to use a public library and still targets pervasive racial injustices across America. Given the atrocities he sees, he's "not quite ready to prioritize same-sex marriage" as an issue in the Black community.

Teaching the audience a quick lesson that brought them to roaring and empathetic laughter, he asked them to respond to the following questions:

"How many of you have a relative in jail? Raise your hand...How many of you support Medicare and Medicaid? Raise your hand...How many of you support social security? Raise your hand...How many have or know someone with home foreclosure? Raise your hand...You know somebody in student loan debt? Raise your hand...You know somebody with credit card debt?"

Amidst Same-Sex Marriage Debate: Jackson, Sharpton Implore Blacks to Keep 'Eyes on the Prize'

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Raise your hand...You know of voter suppression? Raise your hand...You know somebody who needs a job? Raise your hand."

With nearly every hand raised in response to most questions, Rev. Jackson then hit the audience with the unexpected question: "How many have ever been invited to a same-sex marriage?...How many has ever had one in your church?" Not a hand was raised in the room of about 300 people, who broke into laughter – mainly at themselves.

"While we [should be] arguing about our option of Medicare, Medicaid, housing, jobs, and justice, we are arguing about whether someone has the right to engage in a wedding that you were not invited to," Rev. Jackson said as the audience roared with applause and laughter.

Rev. Jackson said he believes the same-sex marriage debate in the Black community is being caused by right wing conservatives who have pushed their priorities onto the Black community. "I don't want anybody to jump line and pull on us their priority," he said.

Likewise, the Rev. Al Sharpton also believes the pervasive discussion on same-sex marriage is a sinister agenda on the part of a stealth right wing that might even be funding those Blacks who advocate not going to the polls.

"I would say that that is the most ridiculous thing I've heard," Sharpton said in a brief interview during Saturday night's CBCF Phoenix Awards Dinner. "First of all, we have disagreed with every president on something. Bill Clinton put bills through that hurt us – welfare reform..We've never talked about not voting. I think that some of the people who are saying this are sponsored by our enemies because show me anywhere in history where we've ever said we're not going to vote because we disagree with the opinion of a president. He didn't propose a law, he didn't say he was going to campaign for a law. He gave an opinion and then all of a sudden they tell people don't vote? Somebody's sponsoring this."

The Rev. Dr. Jamal-Harrison Bryant, who has aimed to register a million voters before the Nov. 6 election says he has been told directly by some pastors that they will not be voting because of President Obama's stance on same-sex marriage. This position gives civil rights leaders an even greater urgency to inspire people to go to the polls.

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"President Barack could actually win the debates and lose the election," said Jackson. "I would urge us to keep your eyes on the prize. Hold on. Hold on. Don't win the same sex debate and lose the right to a house, health, education, jobs, and justice." {comments on}