

The debate continues over homophobia in the black community

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The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force just released a study showing, they say, that black voters in California did not disproportionately support the anti-gay initiative, Prop 8, as compared to other ethnic groups in the state (exit polls showed 70% of blacks supporting Prop 8 versus 50% or so of other major ethnic groups, including Latinos).

Timothy Kincaid at Box Turtle Bulletin, a site that deals with gay issues, but also focuses a lot on race, disagrees with the NGLTF study. You can wade through both analyses yourself, but one point struck me. Reasonable observers have long acknowledged that there is a problem of homophobia in the black community. Barack Obama himself acknowledged this, and (much to Obama's credit) went so far as to speak out against it at Martin Luther King's church on MLK day a year ago.

Obama said at the time: For most of this country's history, we in the African-American community have been at the receiving end of man's inhumanity to man. And all of us understand intimately the insidious role that race still sometimes plays - on the job, in the schools, in our health care system, and in our criminal justice system.

And yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that none of our hands are entirely clean. If we're honest with ourselves, we'll acknowledge that our own community has not always been true to King's vision of a beloved community.

We have scorned our gay brothers and sisters instead of embracing them. The scourge of anti-Semitism has, at times, revealed itself in our community. For too long, some of us have seen immigrants as competitors for jobs instead of companions in the fight for opportunity.

Was Obama wrong? We know, for example, that the Jewish community tends to be very supportive, as a whole, of the civil rights of gays and lesbians. We know that Evangelicals, as a community, are not. Different communities have different religions, different cultures, and different experiences that affect their views on every issue, including gay civil rights. Why is it so anathema to discuss homophobia in the black community? Especially after Obama himself has acknowledged it?

Andy Towle has more updates on the Prop 8 front.