

## **Perry v. Schwarzenegger: Day 7 and 8**

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March 19, 2010

*On day 7 of the Prop 8 trial, Stanford Professor Gary Segura gave a grim evaluation on the status of gay rights in America: "Initiatives have been used to roll back legislative gains by gays and lesbians over and over," he testified. "There is no group in America "...who've been targeted by ballot initiatives more than gays and lesbians." This definitely appears to be true, but why? Why in a country as free and great as the United State of America, is something as physically and emotionally damaging as "conversion therapy" an acceptable course of treatment for those who are gay? There are many reasons for the historically intolerant attitude towards homosexuals, but two entities strike me as much of the driving force behind today's anti-equality movement: churches and minority groups.*

*First, there are the churches. Don't get me wrong. Many churches and religions do support equality, and even some that don't, aren't politically involved in trying to change the law one way or another. That's how it should be, regardless of your religion, sexuality, or political philosophy. Religious groups are entitled to their beliefs, but once those beliefs turn to issue-based political campaigning, a line gets crossed. The separation of church and state is big part of what has made America so strong, not to mention so religious. Europe, like many societies, has witnessed the unholy alliance of religious interests and political interests, and as a result has created a culture that views all religion with cynicism. Americans still believe in religion, they still have faith because it has always stood on its own, without the impure taint of political maneuvering. For whatever reason though, gay rights, and most specifically gay marriage, has begun to change this dynamic.*

*It's never been rare to hear religious leaders speak out here and there when it came to social issues such as teen pregnancy, single-parent families, and violence and sex in movies and music. There was obviously even more public debate when it came to an issue like abortion. But never before have churches entered so far into the fray as they have with gay marriage. In California, not only were Catholic and Mormon sermons preached for months on end on the evils of gay marriage, but they were also raising money to fund campaigns and adds to make sure the law was changed to bar gays from getting married. According to the California Secretary of State, direct contributions for the Catholic Church's political arm, the Knights of Columbus, organizations supporting Prop 8, was \$1.25 million, \$657K from Focus on the Family, and \$189K directly from the Mormon Church. This is unprecedented. It not only violates the premise of a 501(C)3 tax exempt status which forbids any organization with this status to be political in anyway, but more importantly it violates the tenants of what the Founding Fathers wanted when they established a separation between the church and the state. Having seen what an incestuous relationship the two entities had in Europe, and how it destroyed all faith in*

*their religious institutions, while diminishing the freedoms of those who wish to believe differently than the established majority religion, the Founding Fathers knew the only way for people to have faith in both the political process and the church was to keep them separate, while also guaranteeing people's rights to participate in both.*

*While many would agree that churches have no business supporting or funding political campaigns, their parishioners are another story. They can and do exercise that right, and it's estimated that Catholics and Mormons alone contributed almost \$20 million. Without the outspoken encouragement of their clergy, I would say that's democracy at work, but we all know their clergy did play a role in that tremendous fundraising number. So who were most of these church goers that supported Prop 8? Ethnic minorities.*

*According to an Associated Press exit poll, more than 70% of African Americans supported Prop 8, 53% of Latinos supported it (poll by Edison Media Research), and 54% of Asians supported it (poll by Asian Pacific American Legal Center). Forty-nine percent of white voters voted for Prop 8. That isn't to say that minority voters are inherently discriminatory towards gays. What it does point to though, is that there are homophobic mores present in these cultures that aren't being addressed, and those beliefs are often times reinforced by the teachings of the church.*

*I know from experiences with my friends that it's almost always much easier to be white and openly gay than it is to be Latino, African American, or Asian and out of the closet. They have had to deal with much more adversity from their community than I have. With Latinos and African Americans there is often a machismo mentality with their family or friends that says you aren't a man, or at least less of one if you aren't a tough, masculine man who's scoring with girls. With Asians, it's often an issue of disappointment, or not living up to your parent's expectations. As a result, many gay minorities live in the closet, afraid to speak up, and wind up voting and voicing opinions on gay issues that are contrary to their hidden lifestyle.*

*There's also an issue of identification. For many minorities, they feel much greater allegiance to their culture than they do to their sexuality. And because the gay experience is very different depending on what culture you come from, the gay response and obligations to the gay movement are very different. This is part of the reason there is never a coherent message or campaign from the gay community every time we need to be united in order to defeat discrimination. Unlike the civil rights movement, where the majority of those involved were united under the same culture, upbringing, and religion, the gay movement is often fractured because of its diversity of culture, upbringing, and religion. As a result we come at the issue in too many different ways, confusing many of those on the fence, and frustrating the rest. For others, they are too afraid to approach the issue at all for fear of the repercussions from their community.*

*One person bringing the fear to the Asian community, is one of Prop 8's most prominent supporters, William Tam. Tam was active in galvanizing the Asian religious community against*

*gay marriage in 2008. Tam testified on day 8 that he believes the Asian community needs to understand that they should be against gay marriage because "It is very important our children won't grow up to fantasize or think about "should I marry Jane or John when I grow up". He went on to support a previous statement that same-sex marriage will lead to pedophilia claiming that gays are 12 times more likely to molest children, though when pressed on where that statistic came from, he admitted he didn't know. He also admitted to email he sent claiming that if gay marriage were legal, California would fall into the "hands of Satan" and would lead to "moral decay". It's against this backdrop that Tam against stated "these principles are important to the Asian community". Many more William Tam's are out there, winning the argument in the religious ethnic minority communities, while pro-gay alternatives to Tam have yet to speak up. As long as minorities in the gay community are silent, this issue will only get worse.*

*Together, churches and minority groups have teamed up, and have effectively reinforced the cultural and religious homophobia that already existed within them. That synergy has won them an election, but also risks destroying a principle of American religious and political life that is as old as The Constitution, and threatens to further divide ethnic and social minority groups that should be working together to end ALL discrimination. It is time that pro-gay leaders in the religious and ethnic minority community end their silence, and remind their friends and family that legalized homophobia is not a value any culture or religion should embrace.*