

## Gay marriage issue threatens a split in major civil rights organization

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(Taylor Media Services) Civil Rights Movement icon Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led a group of Black activists who founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1959. Even after King's assassination in 1968, the SCLC remained one of the nation's leading civil rights organizations. But now the group's cohesion is under threat. The issue which could potentially split the organization is same-sex marriage.

The Atlanta, Georgia-based leadership of the group has threatened to suspend or remove Rev. Eric P. Lee as head of the Los Angeles SCLC chapter because of his outspoken support for homosexual marriage. But Lee and supporters in the L.A. chapter are fighting back essentially arguing that the national board does not have the authority to remove him. Lee is also thought to be seeking support from other SCLC chapters around the country.

Officially the national board says it is neutral on the gay marriage issue but in reality, the group dominated by Black Southern ministers is strongly opposed to same-sex marriage. Their view appears to be backed by a large majority of African Americans. An Edison/Mitofsky exit poll found that 70 percent of Black voters supported California's Proposition 8 last fall. The proposition banned gay-marriage in the state.

A similar national online survey conducted recently by Taylor Media Services found 72 percent of Blacks opposing same-sex marriage which was supported by a slim majority of whites. Hispanics were evenly split on the issue.