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The Express is published bi-weekly on Mondays. Our paper is a member of the Associated Press, and a Founding Member of the Gay American Media Association.

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"This Above All... To Thine Own Self Be True. And it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."
• Shakespeare / Hamlet / I / III

Price Lines



Deb Price

Gays Must Further Cultivate Minorities

The best coalitions are mutually supportive: You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours. And gay Americans are well on our way to forming a strong political coalition with other minority groups: The vast majority of Latinos and African Americans say they oppose anti-gay discrimination.

That encouraging finding, from a poll conducted in October by the Feldman Group for the Gay and Lesbian Victory Foundation, should serve as an important reminder to the gay community that coalition-building is a two-way proposition. Specifically, that means the gay community must work harder to get talented gay men and lesbians of color into elective office as well as into the top ranks of national gay civil rights organizations.

The Victory Foundation, a non-partisan group dedicated to promoting, training and encouraging future openly gay officeholders, is the perfect organization to take the lead in this drive. For one thing, its keen awareness of the problem spurred the survey of Latino and African-American attitudes toward gay issues. As Executive Director Brian Bond explains, "The reason we started this project was to identify why there aren't more gay and lesbian candidates of color."

To date, the gay community, once led almost entirely by white men, has been more effective at helping talented white women advance to top leadership roles

than it has been in boosting gays of color. For example, Rep. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., is one of three openly gay members of Congress — all of them white. Another white lesbian, Elizabeth Birch, heads the 800-pound gorilla of the gay political world, the Human Rights Campaign.

Although their numbers are still sparse, a number of openly gay Latinos and African Americans are rising up the political ranks. Anthony Romero is a sterling example. A gay Latino lawyer, he's the new executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, the organization that continues to play an instrumental role in fighting for the rights of all minorities.

And several gay politicians of color

perceived as white," Bond stresses. "There's a lot of talent out there, gay men and lesbians of color who don't feel they can step up to the plate. We need to make sure they get the support and resources to run strong campaigns."

All prospective gay candidates, regardless of race or ethnic group, should be aware that the Latino and African-American communities can be prime sources of votes for them. As the Feldman Group concluded, "These communities will support gay candidates and are, in fact, more likely in some ways to do so than voters in Anglo white communities." The numbers tell the story:

- Seventy-eight percent of Latinos and 67 percent of African Americans support "health care benefits" for gay people's partners.

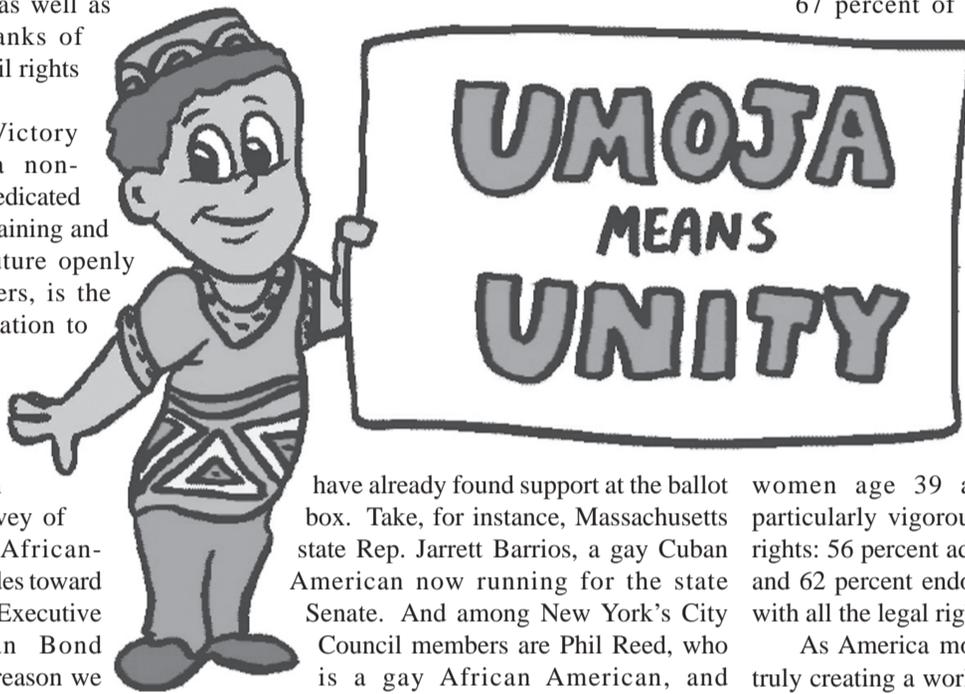
- Seventy percent of African Americans and 65 percent of Latinos say it should be illegal to fire someone for being gay.

- Young Latinas — Hispanic

women age 39 and under — are particularly vigorous in embracing gay rights: 56 percent advocate gay marriage and 62 percent endorse gay civil unions with all the legal rights of marriage.

As America moves forward toward truly creating a world where everyone is judged by equal standards, the gay community needs to create stronger bridges to racial minority communities. And we must work harder to showcase the racial diversity within the gay community.

Deb Price of The Detroit News writes the first nationally syndicated column on gay issues and is the co-author of "Courting Justice: Gay Men and Lesbians v. the Supreme Court."



have already found support at the ballot box. Take, for instance, Massachusetts state Rep. Jarrett Barrios, a gay Cuban American now running for the state Senate. And among New York's City Council members are Phil Reed, who is a gay African American, and Margarita Lopez, who is a Puerto Rican lesbian.

"If we are truly going to be inclusive and build strong coalitions outside the gay and lesbian community, we are going to have to change the face of the gay community, which continues to be

adam & andy by james asal

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