



## NAACP Chair to open national LGBT rights conference

By Sarah Mieras

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A vocal supporter of gay marriage since 2004, the celebrated chair of the NAACP, the Honorable Julian Bond, will open the **20th Annual National Creating Change Conference Friday**.

Bond, who has drawn connections between the sanctions against black Americans being able to marry and the fight for gay and lesbian marriage rights, calling being gay as inborn as race. Without an official organizational position on gay and lesbian marriage, Bond and other NAACP leadership remain free to speak with their conscience on the issue.

"We know there was a time, not so long ago, when black people in this country couldn't marry the person of their choice either," said Bond. "That's why when I am asked, 'Are gay rights civil rights?' my answer is always, 'Of course they are.'"

Earlier this year Bond stepped forward to serve on the Honorary Board of the campaign to defeat an anti-gay Florida Marriage Protection Amendment, which is slated for the fall ballot. Bond has also been instrumental in gathering support from the NAACP for the Employment Non Discrimination Act (EDNA), which aims to protect all workers from discrimination based on sexual orientation.

His continued support of LGBT civil rights issues over the last four years have drawn fire from African American clergy and community leaders. In publicly distributed letter to Marsha Ellison, president of the NAACP's Fort Lauderdale branch, Bond describes how the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement and the quest for LGBT civil rights can co-exist.

"A people who suffered bigotry in the past,' Bond writes, "and suffer from it today ought to be the last people in the world to tolerate bigotry toward others. For some, comparisons between the African-American civil rights movement and the movement for gay and lesbian rights seem to diminish the long black historical struggle with all its suffering, sacrifices and endless toil.

However, people of color should be flattered that our movement has provided so much inspiration for others, that it has been so widely imitated, and that our tactics, methods, heroines and heroes, even our songs, have been appropriated by or served as models for others."

An iconic member of the civil rights movement, Bond has served as chair of the NAACP since 1998. His lifelong career as an activist began in the early 1960's when he helped start the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which organized student protests at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. He helped found the Southern Poverty Law Center. During the contentious 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Bond was put forward as the first African American candidate for Vice President of the United States. From 1965 to 1975, he served as a member of the Georgia House and was elected to the Georgia Senate for six consecutive terms. Bond has been a professor at a number of universities, including Harvard and Drexel. He is a Professor in Residence at American University in Washington and a professor of history at the University of Virginia. In 2005 he received a Leadership Award from the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**.

A celebrated writer and lecturer, Bond has authored: "A Time To Speak, A Time To Act," and "Black Candidates Southern Campaign Experiences."

Bond will open NGLTF's Creating Change Conference with his plenary address at 8 p.m. on Friday, February 7 at the Detroit Renaissance Center. For registration information, visit [www.thetaskforce.org](http://www.thetaskforce.org).