

**Keynote Address by Julian Bond,
Chairman, NAACP**

**Given at the 20th National Conference on LGBT Equality: Creating Change,
in Detroit, Mich., on Feb. 7, 2008**

DETROIT, Feb. 7 — I want to talk about “civil rights” because I believe “gay rights” are “civil rights.” As my late neighbor and friend, Coretta Scott King, said in 1998: “Homophobia is like racism and anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry in that it seeks to dehumanize a large group of people, to deny their humanity, their dignity and personhood.



And in 2000 she added: “We have a lot more work to do in our common struggle against bigotry and discrimination. I say ‘common struggle’ because I believe very strongly that all forms of bigotry and discrimination are equally wrong and should be opposed by right-thinking Americans everywhere. Freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation is surely a fundamental human right in any great democracy, as much as freedom from racial, religious, gender or ethnic discrimination.”

That is why, at its February board meeting two years ago, the NAACP unanimously passed a resolution stating: “[W]e shall pursue all legal and constitutional means to support non-discriminatory policies and practices against persons based on race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality or cultural background.”

We acted in order to “ensure equal protection under the law for all and create a more civil and just society” It was also because of this “common struggle” that, in 2006, the South African parliament legalized same-sex marriage. The home affairs minister of the African National Congress argued, “In breaking with our past ... we need to fight and resist all forms of discrimination and prejudice, including homophobia.”

Martin Luther King Jr. fought for compassion and justice for all people. It has been 40 years this April since King was gunned down in Memphis. He has now been dead one year longer than he lived.

Three years ago we observed the 50th anniversary of the Montgomery Bus Boycott — the event that introduced King to the world. He was 26 years old. At that early age and at the early stage of the boycott, King understood its historical significance. Four days after Rosa Parks stood up for justice by sitting down, the boycott began.

That evening, at the first mass meeting, King declared: “... When the history books are written in the future, somebody will have to say, ‘there lived a race of people, a black people ... who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights. And thereby they injected a new meaning into the veins of history and civilization’.”

King did not exaggerate. Montgomery was the beginning of a mass movement that destroyed segregation and permanently changed our world. Thus it is no coincidence that three years ago we also celebrated the 40th anniversary of the passage of the Voting Rights Act. And last year we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Last year we also celebrated the 40th anniversary of a case aptly called *Loving v. Virginia*, which struck down anti-miscegenation laws and, many years later, allowed my wife and me to marry in the state that declares “Virginia is for lovers.” Then, as now, proponents of marriage-as-is wanted to amend the United States Constitution. Introducing a constitutional amendment in 1911 to ban interracial marriage, Rep. Seaborn Roddenberry of my former home state of Georgia argued: “Intermarriage between whites and blacks is repulsive and averse to every sentiment of pure American spirit. It is abhorrent and repugnant. It is subversive to social peace. It is destructive of moral supremacy.”

Sound familiar? Then, as now, proponents of marriage-as-is invoked “God’s plan.” The trial judge who sentenced the Lovings said that when God created the races: “... He placed them on separate continents ... The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix.”

God seems to have made room in his plan for interracial marriage. He — or she — will no doubt do the same for same-sex marriage.

Martin Luther King’s first national address was at a 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage at the Lincoln Memorial. In 1963 alone, the year that King — fresh from the battlefields of Birmingham — told the nation of his dream at the March on Washington, there were more than 10,000 anti-racist demonstrations. The result was the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act — the most sweeping civil rights legislation before or since and our democracy’s finest hour.

The spirit of Martin Luther King stands over any election, given the lasting importance of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But King’s spirit has been especially evident this year. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, or religion illegal. When the four Democratic candidates for president held their debate in New Hampshire, there was only one white male among them, seated alongside a black, a woman, and a Hispanic. And even the other side’s all-white, all male cast of characters included a Mormon.

It would be a cruel irony, though, if while one side’s white males slugged it out, the other side’s contest devolved into a race versus gender war. A writer reminds us, “While some white women were treated as property during the 19th century, most black women [and men] were property...”ⁱⁱⁱ

Equally ironic is the prospect of the man who likes to be called “the first black president” helping to bring down the man who would be the real first black president.

Whatever the outcome, the process by which we select presidential candidates is clearly broken. The deforming machinery of money and math frustrates the entire procedure.ⁱⁱⁱ Front-loading may be a good idea for washing machines, but it is a terrible idea for

elections. In a year in which Iowa and New Hampshire were supposed to have less significance, they instead took on more, while one party's candidates were forced to ignore Michigan and Florida, two large states with diverse populations. As someone put it, "caucus" is Greek for "giving Iowa grandiose importance" and the motto of New Hampshire ought to be "where Big 'Mo' goes to die." Both of these states are not only overwhelmingly white, but Iowa's caucus system is undemocratic and its rules arcane. And the number of voters in any large county in the United States equals the number of primary voters in New Hampshire.

In 2004, the Internal Revenue Service sought to revoke the NAACP's tax-exempt status because I dared to criticize President Bush. During the civil rights movement, we sang songs to bolster our resolve. One of them said, "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around." Well, we ain't gonna let nobody turn us around, including the IRS, and the NAACP will continue to speak truth to power until the Administration leaves town.

What the NAACP did not do in 2004 and will not do now is endorse a candidate. We always have been and we always will be scrupulously non-partisan. But that doesn't mean we necessarily reject partisanship. It has its place, especially when our two major political parties exist on two separate planets, and one is dominated by neo-cons, theo-cons, and nativists.

Both sides favor compromise, as long as the other side gives in. Our political system is adversarial by design. President Bush said he wanted to be a uniter. It took him seven years, but boy, has he succeeded. He has united Americans around a desire for change. He has united Americans in our anxiety — about our economic well-being and whether, perchance, the American dream is over; about an unpopular war of choice; and about America's reduced standing in the world.

As Martin Luther King said of another unpopular war: "In addition to the isolation of the people from the government, there is our national isolation in the world."^{iv}

Of course, the president never wanted to be a uniter. He thrived on Rovian politics of divide and conquer and lived in a fairy-tale world of 'Mission Accomplished.' For the first six years of the Bush administration, Republicans had the numbers and Democrats wouldn't take their own side in a fight.

When Democrats gained control, albeit barely, of both houses after the 2006 midterm elections, it was the harbinger of the desire for change now sweeping the nation. Compared to today, we look back on the years between Montgomery in 1955 and the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 with some pride.

Those were the days when women and men from both parties and of all backgrounds worked together in the cause of civil rights.

Those were the days when good music was popular and popular music was good. Those were the days when the president picked the Supreme Court and not the other way around.

Those were the days when we had a war on poverty, not a war on the poor. Those were the days when patriotism was a reason for open-eyed disobedience, not an excuse for

blind allegiance.

Those were the days when the news media really was “fair and balanced” and not just stenographers for the powerful.

But those were not “the good old days.”

In those days, “[t]he law, the courts, the schools, and almost every institution ... favored whites. This was white supremacy.”^v

Most Southern blacks then could not vote. They attended inadequate, segregated schools, if they went at all, and many attended only a few months each year. Most could not hope to gain an education beyond high school. Most worked as farmers, or semi-skilled laborers. Few owned the land they farmed, or even the homes in which they lived.

This was a massive system of racial preferences — enforced by law and terror. It had one name and one aim — to crush the human development of a whole population. It began with slave-catching in Africa, and it continues on to the present day.

Only by acknowledging the name, nature and scope of the problem can we measure the magnitude of our successes — and the costs of our failures.

We misunderstand our racial circumstances today because we willfully misunderstand yesterday’s, adopting instead a sanitized view of the movement and of Martin Luther King. As historian Glenda Gilmore writes: “In the simplified stories the media told of the movement, civil rights came to mean school integration, access to public accommodations, and voting rights. This view erased the complexity of a drive to eliminate the economic injustices wrought by slavery, debt peonage, and a wage labor system based on degraded black labor.”^{vi}

When the Supreme Court announced in May, 1955, in the second *Brown* decision, that the white South could make haste slowly in dismantling segregated schools, I was a year older than Emmet Till.

His death three months after *Brown II* was more immediate to me than the court’s decision had been. We were nearly the same age when he was murdered, in Money, Mississippi, for whistling at a white woman.

Emmett Till’s death had frightened me. But in the fall of 1957 a group of black teenagers encouraged me to put that fear aside. These young people – the nine young women and men who integrated Little Rock’s Central High School — set a high standard of grace and courage under fire as they dared the mobs who surrounded their school.

Here, I thought, is what I hope I can be, if ever the chance comes my way.

The chance to test and prove myself did come my way in 1960, as it came to thousands of other black high school and college students across the South. First through the sit-ins, then in Freedom Rides, and then in voter registration and political organizing drives in the rural South, we joined an old movement against white supremacy that had deep, strong roots.

We are such a young nation so recently removed from slavery that only my father's generation stands between Julian Bond and human bondage. Like many others, I am the grandson of a slave.

My grandfather, James Bond, was born in 1863, in Kentucky; freedom didn't come for him until the 13th Amendment was ratified in 1865.

He and his mother were property, like a horse or a chair. As a young girl, she had been given away as a wedding present to a new bride, and when that bride became pregnant, her husband — that's my great-grandmother's owner and master — exercised his right to take his wife's slave as his mistress.

That union produced two children, one of them my grandfather.

At age 15, barely able to read and write, he hitched his tuition — a steer — to a rope and walked across Kentucky to Berea College and the college took him in.

Berea was opened by abolitionists as an integrated school in 1855. It was closed by the Civil War, but opened again in 1866 with 187 students — 96 blacks and 91 whites. It dared to provide a rare commodity in the former slave states — an education open to all — blacks and whites, women and men.

My grandfather belonged to a transcendent generation of black Americans, a generation born into slavery, freed by the Civil War, determined to make their way as free women and men.

Martin Luther King belonged to another transcendent generation of black Americans, a generation born into segregation, freed from racism's constraints by their own efforts, determined to make their way in freedom

That the quest for equal rights for all remains unfulfilled today is no indictment of past efforts. It is testament to the challenge that lies ahead.

When my grandfather graduated from Berea, in 1892, the college asked him to deliver the commencement address.

He said then: "The pessimist from his corner looks out on the world of wickedness and sin, and blinded by all that is good or hopeful in the condition and progress of the human race, bewails the present state of affairs and predicts woeful things for the future.

"In every cloud he beholds a destructive storm, in every flash of lightning an omen of evil, and in every shadow that falls across his path a lurking foe.

"He forgets that the clouds also bring life and hope, that lightning purifies the atmosphere, that shadow and darkness prepare for sunshine and growth, and that hardships and adversity nerve the race, as the individual, for greater efforts and grander victories."^{vii}

In the first years of the 21st century, we have been tested by "hardships and adversity." If my grandfather was right, we are now poised for "greater efforts and grander victories." Already, our democracy is healthier than it was before the 2006 midterm elections. We

affirmed the words of Theodore Roosevelt, who said in 1918: “To announce there must be no criticism of the President, or to stand by the President, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, it is morally treasonous to the American public.”

And the words of Ohio Senator Robert Taft, who said two weeks after Pearl Harbor was attacked: “I believe there can be no doubt that criticism in times of war is essential to the maintenance of any kind of democratic government.”

What happened on Election Day 2006 was not an election — it was an intervention!

President Bush saw his presidency repudiated, from the natural disaster of Katrina — to which he did not respond — to the disaster in Iraq which he created. U.S. troop levels — and deaths — were at their highest in 2007. We will soon reach the sad milestone of 4,000 U. S. soldiers killed in Iraq.

The costs at home are also immense. Confronting the Vietnam War, Dr. King spoke of “the inescapable contradiction between war and social progress at home,” saying that “military adventures must stultify domestic progress to insure the certainty of military success.”^{viii}

One day of the Iraq war costs 720 million dollars while 37 million Americans live in poverty. This represents about 13 percent of the population — the highest percentage in the developed world. The number has grown since 2001, with more than 5.4 million people having slipped below the poverty line during the Bush administration.

And the gap has grown between the haves, the have-mores and the have-nots. The top 300,000 Americans collectively have almost as much income as the bottom 150 million Americans. The top 20 percent of earners take over half the national income, while the bottom 20 percent get just 3.4 percent. Black Americans, of course, are more likely to be among the bottom-earners than the top. Almost a quarter of black Americans nationwide live below the poverty line as compared to only 8.6 percent of whites.

Almost every social indicator, from birth to death, reflects black-white disparities. Infant mortality rates are 146 percent higher for blacks; chances of imprisonment are 447 percent higher; rate of death from homicide 521 percent higher; lack of health insurance 42 percent more likely; the proportion with a college degree 60 percent lower. And the average white American will live 5 ½ years longer than the average black American.”^{ix}

The Civil War that freed my grandfather was fought over whether blacks and whites shared a common humanity. Less than ten years after it ended, the nation chose sides with the losers and agreed to continue black repression for almost 100 years. The freed slaves found that their former masters once again controlled their fate.

American slavery was a human horror of staggering dimensions, a crime against humanity. The profits it produced endowed great fortunes and enriched generations, and its dreadful legacy embraces all of us today.

Two hundred and forty-six years of slavery were followed by 100 years of state-sanctioned discrimination, reinforced by public and private terror, ending only after a protracted struggle in 1965.

Thus it has been only a short 40 years or so that *all* black Americans have exercised the full rights of citizens, only 40 years since legal segregation was ended nationwide, only 40 years since the right to register and vote was universally guaranteed, only 40 years since the protections of the law and Constitution were officially extended to all.

And now some are telling us those 40 years have been enough. To believe that is the victory of hope over experience. To believe that is the victory of self-delusion over common sense. We take heart that a black man is a viable candidate for president of the United States. We know that his electoral success — even if he should win the ultimate prize — will not signal an end to racial discrimination, but it marks the continuation of an interracial political movement that dates back to the Underground Railroad.

The country seems proud, and rightly so, that a candidate campaigning in cities where he could not have stayed in a hotel 40 years ago may win his party's nomination for the nation's highest office. But on the heels of Barack Obama's victory in Iowa came the suggestion by a television commentator that Tiger Woods be "lynched," and the revelation that a Republican candidate had said that the 1992 Los Angeles riots ended because "it came time for blacks to pick up their welfare checks" and had charged that Martin Luther King seduced young boys and girls. Such is the complex rhythm of our nation's racial dance.

The modern movement for civil rights has its immediate origins in the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. *Brown* effectively ended segregation's legality; it gave a nonviolent army license to challenge segregation's morality as well.

A year after *Brown*, an NAACP activist in Montgomery, Alabama, refused to give up her seat on a city bus so a white man could sit down. Five years after Montgomery, four young black men, college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, refused to give up their seats at a dime store lunch counter reserved for whites.

These small acts of passive resistance to American apartheid — and the cumulative acts of tens of thousands more — created a people's movement that eliminated legal segregation in less than a decade.

We must not forget that Martin Luther King stood before and walked with thousands, the people who made the mighty movement what it was.

From Jamestown's slave pens to Montgomery's boycotted busses, these ordinary men and women labored in obscurity, and from Montgomery forward they provided the foot soldiers of the freedom army.

They walked in dignity, rather than ride in shame. They faced bombs in Birmingham and mobs in Mississippi. They sat down at lunch counters so others could stand up. They marched — and they organized.

Martin Luther King didn't march from Selma to Montgomery by himself. He didn't speak to an empty field at the March on Washington. There were thousands marching with him and before him, and thousands more who did the dirty work that preceded the triumphal march.

The successful strategies of the modern movement for civil rights were litigation, organization, mobilization and coalition, all aimed at creating a national constituency for civil rights. Sometimes the simplest of acts — sitting at a lunch counter, going to a new

school, applying for a marriage license, casting a vote — can challenge the way we think and act.

That's why when I am asked, "Are gay rights civil rights?" my answer is always, "Of course they are."

"Civil rights" are positive legal prerogatives — the right to equal treatment before the law. These are rights shared by all — there is no one in the United States who does not — or should not — share in these rights.

Gay and lesbian rights are not "special rights" in any way. It isn't "special" to be free from discrimination — it is an ordinary, universal entitlement of citizenship. The right not to be discriminated against is a common-place claim we all expect to enjoy under our laws and our founding document, the Constitution. That many had to struggle to gain these rights makes them precious — it does not make them special, and it does not reserve them only for me or restrict them from others.

When others gain these rights, my rights are not reduced in any way. The more civil rights are won by others, the stronger the army defending my rights becomes. My rights are not diluted when my neighbor enjoys protection from the law — he or she becomes my ally in defending the rights we all share.

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 ought to 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.

No parallel between movements for rights is exact. African-Americans are the only Americans who were enslaved for more than two centuries, and people of color carry the badge of who we are on our faces. But we are far from the only people suffering discrimination — sadly, so do many others. They deserve the law's protections and civil rights, too.

Sexual disposition parallels race — I was born black and had no choice. I couldn't and wouldn't change it if I could. Like race, our sexuality isn't a preference — it is immutable, unchangeable, and the Constitution protects us all against prejudices and discrimination based on immutable differences.

Many gays and lesbians worked side by side with me in the '60s civil rights movement. Am I to now tell them "thanks" for risking life and limb helping me win my rights — but they are excluded because of a condition of their birth? That they cannot share now in the victories they helped to win? That having accepted and embraced them as partners in a common struggle, I can now turn my back on them and deny them the rights they helped me win, that I enjoy because of them?

Not a chance.

Today, for better or for worse, gay rights are embodied in the debate over marriage. As one writer says: "Conservative preachers and right-wing activists can't let go of gay

marriage. They're still using its "threat" to traditional families to rally their parishioners, lest they forget to be judgmental and unwittingly slip into love and mercy."^x

While the ostensible purpose of these amendments is to enshrine in state constitutions additional — and unneeded — prohibitions against same-sex marriage, in fact they have several different purposes — all of them are anti-marriage, all of them wrong-headed, all of them discriminatory, and all of them politically based.

Marriage in the United States today has a 50 percent failure rate. I should think we would welcome anyone who wanted to support and join this failing institution. The NAACP, whose board I chair, vigorously opposed President George W. Bush's attempt to pass a federal constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. We also oppose state-level attempts to do the same thing.

The NAACP does not take a position for or against same-sex marriage, although I personally support the right of two people in love to enjoy the many, many legal benefits of state sanctioned marriage. But we believe it is always wrong to use a federal or state Constitution to single out one group of people for discrimination.

President Bush has said marriage is "the most fundamental institution of our civilization." Isn't that precisely why we should support, not oppose, gay marriage? We have amended the United States Constitution only 17 times since the adoption of the Bill of Rights. Aside from Prohibition, which was quickly acknowledged to be a mistake and repealed, we've amended the Constitution only to expand and protect people's rights, never to restrict or take them away.

Proponents of these amendments argue they are insurance against so-called "activist" judges, presumably like those on the Supreme Court whose activism interfered in the 2000 election process and crowned George W. Bush President.

The federal Defense of Marriage Act and state laws defining marriage as between one man and one woman already stand as a bulwark against judicial activism. As notable a conservative figure as J. Harvie Wilkinson III, Judge on the United States 4th Circuit Court of Appeals, calls the passage of these amendments in states across the country "a sad state of affairs."^{xi}

Judge Wilkinson writes that the framers of our Constitution did not "envision our Constitution as a place to restrict rights or enact public policies, as the Federal Marriage Amendment does."^{xii} The real purpose of these amendments was and is to draw conservative voters to the polls, offering them the red meat that motivates so many Americans to cast votes.

But in a survey reported in the December 2004 issue of *Facts & Trends* magazine, when pastors were asked to name the number one threat to the family, 43 percent named divorce, 38 percent named negative influences in the media, 36 percent cited materialism. 24 percent said absentee fathers, families without a stay-at-home parent were listed by 18 percent, pornography was a reason for 17 percent, morality not being taught in schools was mentioned by 14 percent, and poverty, unemployment and a poor economy were mentioned by 13 percent.

Same-sex marriage did not make the list.^{xiii}

We know there are many who base their support of these laws and their opposition to same-sex marriage on Biblical inerrancy, on the proposition that Leviticus 18: 22 prohibits homosexuality and God's law must be obeyed. Believers ought not to force their laws on people of different faiths or people of no faith at all. Marriage is a civil right. If you don't want gay people to marry in your church, all right. But you cannot say they can't be married in City Hall because of your religious beliefs.

Religious extremists want to install a Christian caliphate in America, replacing laws debated by men with laws dictated by religion. They are cafeteria Christians, picking a Biblical injunction from column A while ignoring those from columns B through Z.

Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. Does this apply to Mexicans or Canadians or both?

Exodus 21:7 sanctions selling my daughter into slavery. I have two very pretty daughters — what would be a fair price for the pair? Leviticus 15:19-24 forbids me from having contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness. The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women seem to take offense. Are there any here? If so, should they be asked to leave?

My neighbors insist on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states they should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill them myself, or should I ask the police to do it?

Leviticus 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle-room here?

My uncle has a farm. He violates Leviticus.19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread, usually a cotton/polyester blend. He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them as it says in Leviticus 21: 10 – 16? Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws as in Leviticus 20:14?

We must not forget the powerful influence of religion — not Islam, but Christianity — in creating the image of the greedy Jew, the Christ-killer. The religious right represents more than a conservative force in our society. They are central to the contention that all things "Christian" are American and right; things non-Christian — including Jews and homosexuals — are less American and wrong.

To its credit, the Jewish Theological Seminary, the center of Conservative Judaism, last year joined Reform Jews in accepting gay rabbis.

The black church has much to answer for — for harboring ugly homophobia and for its refusal to adopt a proactive stance against HIV and AIDS.

Four years ago, *Atlanta Constitution* Editorial Page Editor Cynthia Tucker wrote: "Nowhere are the front lines in the battle against gay marriage tended with more

care than in conservative black churches, where ministers regularly denounce homosexuality as an abomination. The disproportionate spread of HIV among black women can be traced directly to the covert world of black men on the "down low" -- men who secretly engage in sex with other men while keeping girlfriends or wives and pointedly denying that they are gay or bisexual. That underworld, meanwhile, has its roots in black homophobia, so virulent that these men are unwilling or unable to acknowledge their sexuality."^{xiv}

In black America, homophobia spreads from our churches to our homes and our schools. Our inability to talk about sex, and more specifically homosexuality, is the single greatest barrier to the prevention of HIV transmission in our community.

We have failed to heed Martin Luther King's warning, originally meant for others but applicable to us now: "Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity."

And no where is this better illustrated than in the response of some black clergy to the Matthew Shepard Act, which would have strengthened our nation's hate crime laws to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Somewhere in America a hate crime occurs once every hour! Churches are burned because of the people who attend them or the God worshipped within. People are attacked because of who they are, what they look like, or where they were born. These crimes terrorize entire communities, and they turn back the clock on our hard fought march of progress.

Yet certain black ministers opposed the Matthew Shepard Act. They falsely claimed it would make it unlawful for them to preach against homosexuality. Unless a pastor were also holding a gun or brandishing another weapon, he could continue to be free to preach his noxious version of the Bible.

Rampant homophobia is not just wrong, it is dangerous to our national security. The United States military spent more than \$200 million dollars to recruit and train personnel to replace the 10,000 troops discharged for being openly gay between 1993 and 2003. More than 300 language experts have been fired under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," including 50 Arab speaking personnel whose skills were vital to the war on terror.

In 1989, a Pentagon study concluded that sexuality "is unrelated to job performance in the same way as is being left- or right-handed."^{xv} Our fighting women and men, gay and straight, fight today beside troops from Australia, Britain, Italy and Spain — all countries that permit gays to serve openly.

No sooner had retired Army General John Shalikashvili called for reconsideration of "don't ask, don't tell" last year, than his successor as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace, opined that were gays to serve openly the military would be condoning "immoral acts."

But last fall 27 retired generals and admirals joined General Shalikashvili in urging Congress to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," a position favored by all of the Democratic presidential candidates.

Senator Obama has compared it to the integration of blacks into the armed forces — not just an achievable goal but a moral issue as well.

Peter Pace is being out-paced. The world is changing around him.

As we go forward, let us recall the words of Eugene Debs, the great labor leader, who speaks to us now: “I can see the dawn of a better day for humanity. The people awakening, in due course of time, will come to their own. When the mariner sailing over tropic seas looks for release from his weary watch, he turns his eye toward the Southern Cross. ... As midnight approaches, the Southern Cross begins to bend ... and ... marks the page of time upon the dial of the universe and ... the lookout knows that midnight is passing. ... Let the people take heart and hope everywhere for the Cross is bending, the midnight is passing, and joy cometh with the morning.”

Thank you.

Copyright 2008 by Julian Bond

Julian Bond has been Chairman of the NAACP Board of Directors since February 1998. He is a distinguished scholar in the School of Government at American University in Washington, D.C., and a professor in the Department History at the University of Virginia.

-
- ⁱ Martin Luther King, Jr. “MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church” (December 5, 1955).
ⁱⁱ “Oops! She Did It Again: An Open Letter to Gloria Steinem”, Kellie Goff, The Huffington Post, (January 12, 2008)
ⁱⁱⁱ The Nation, “Election ’08” (Jan. 7-14,2008)
^{iv} Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Domestic Impact of the War in Vietnam” (January 11, 1967).
^v Franklin, John Hope & Alfred Moss, Jr., From Slavery to Freedom (12th ed.).
^{vi} Glenda Gilmore, Defying Dixie: The Racial Roots of Civil Rights, 1919 – 1950, Norton Publishing (2007)
^{vii} “Commencement Address,” by James Bond, Berea College Reporter (June 1892).
^{viii} Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Domestic Impact of the War in Vietnam” (January 11, 1967).
^x Cynthia Tucker, “Homophobia Kills”, Atlanta Constitution, June 6, 2004.
^{xi} J. Harvie Wilkinson, Judge, United States Court of Appeals for the 4th District, the News & Observer, September 8, 2006.
^{xii} Ibid.
^{xiii} “Will the Same-Sex Marriage Amendment Really Help the Traditional Family?” by John W. Whitehead, Weekly Commentary, October 20, 2006.
^{xiv} Goodwin, LIU “The meaning of Brown v. Board” Los Angeles Times December 25, 2006.
^{xv} “Gerry Studds, Gay Congressman Who Served 12 Terms, is Dead”, The New York Times, October 15, 2006.