

Why The NAACP National Board Of Directors Voted To Oppose Codifying Discrimination

By: Derrick Johnson, State President
Mississippi NAACP

The NAACP's recent decision concerning marriage equality is a continuation of our mission and constitution, which states our objective is to ensure the "political, educational, social and economic equality" of *all people*. We support marriage equality consistent with the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution.

This support does not mean the NAACP has adopted a position on same-sex marriage from a personal, moral, or religious perspective. We have no such position on an individual's sexual orientation.

We deeply respect our members' personal and moral beliefs and, as our resolution states, "we strongly affirm the religious freedoms of all people as protected by the First Amendment." The NAACP has always advocated strongly on behalf of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, and this is an extension of that mission.

Indeed, the Mississippi State Conference of the NAACP honors and defends religious institutions from being discriminated against, just as we honor and defend individual rights.

For decades, this great nation was divided by miscegenation and segregation laws created specifically to pare us into easily controlled enclaves. Those in power knew full well that a poor white population separated from its poor black brethren would never have the strength to challenge a system designed to keep the majority impoverished and as a source of cheap and free labor.

Today, the battle to divide us continues--only now we are capable of recognizing it.

Segregation laws helped maintain a rift between the races, weakening them. Today, those looking to cut deeply into the clout of a struggling middle class now seek to emasculate African-American churches and divert them from their age-old battle for social equality and reform by hammering the divisive issues of morality such as abortion and now same sex marriage.

It is no coincidence that we are seeing multiple states dredge up marriage purity laws at a time when the middle class is becoming aware of growing economic inequities between the richest Americans and the rest of the nation. Likewise, it is no accident that the issue of same sex marriage arises at a time when a host of southern states seek to create laws restricting voting.

Many of the same people who seek to remove citizens from voter rolls or impose strict new voting requirements also demand we ban the rights and privileges for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,

Why The NAACP National Board Of Directors Voted To Oppose Codifying Discrimination

Transgender (LGBT) citizens. Simply put: those who seek to confine our rights would first divide our voice.

The Black Church is a force of strength and organization in our community, and we support the belief that the church must continue to take positions based on issues of faith. However, issues of faith are not the domain in which the NAACP operates. The NAACP serves to protect individuals and religions in the realm of government treatment under the United States Constitution.

For the NAACP, marriage equality is not a question of what is morally right, or allowed by religion. It is a question of whether individuals are provided equal protection under the law.

While marriage is a religious practice, it is also a phenomenon synchronized by the government, which allots governmental rights and privileges, such as Social Security, disability and veteran's benefits for a spouse.

The NAACP has always fought for a government that treats its citizens equally. If we are to remain true to our objective of equal protection for all, then we must come to terms with marriage equality as a right for every person. In short, one can be religiously and culturally hetero-centric without being legally and constitutionally homophobic.

The NAACP board has heard the argument that marriage equality undermines the institution of marriage, but we also recognize that the highest rate for domestic violence, unwed parenthood and divorce sits well within the nation's Bible belt, where there is greatest resistance to marriage equality. Logic suggests that any genuine effort to defend marriage on a legal level must begin with an attack upon the high divorce rate, the scourge of domestic violence, and the crippling impact of unwed parenthood. However, we are not faced today with a flurry of laws seeking to restrict these events. The question is why not?

We must conclude that the LGBT community is instead just one more social class targeted with discrimination. The recent call for war against marriage equality amounts to a war on yet another minority. It is a war that seeks to isolate us from one another, as it has attempted to isolate us from our Latino brethren, and from economically underprivileged Caucasians. We have seen this tactic in the past, and we must not again fall victim to it. LGBT persons are our sons, our daughters, our family members, our co-workers and our fellow church members.

The NAACP has and must always speak out against attempts by the government to codify discrimination against any group, including efforts to restrict marriage equality at the state and federal level. We followed strong NAACP principles in our fight against laws restricting inter-

Why The NAACP National Board Of Directors Voted To Oppose Codifying Discrimination

racial marriage and other Jim Crow laws, and NAACP principles have proven sturdier than the notions of the vocally intolerant, leading the way to a new, more tolerant society. Our mothers and fathers can remember when it was considered culturally abhorrent for Blacks and Whites to marry, when such intermingling was considered atrocious and harmful to the whole of

society in the eyes of the law. The NAACP and its members were among the few who heralded this social evolution.

Then and now, we must not align ourselves with any effort to codify discrimination but instead to speak out on advancing equal treatment under the law.