



## Civil rights today: readers respond

By Adam Parker  
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The gap between our ideals and our daily life is sometimes profound, sometimes barely noticeable, but it's almost always there.

Nowhere has this discrepancy been more pronounced than in the context of civil rights. The nation's founding documents declare that all men are created equal, yet it took two centuries for the law of the land to codify equality, and many say the country continues to struggle with the issue. It seems that ensuring all people are equal is easier said than done.

This week, the NAACP, the oldest continuously functioning civil rights organization in America, marked its centennial. The Post and Courier took the opportunity to ask readers to reflect on today's civil rights concerns. A selection of responses follows.

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In South Carolina, we should make sure that all children are provided an equal start in life with an excellent education, and we should take active steps to end the so-called "school to prison pipeline" that sends too many young people to jail rather than setting them on the right path to becoming good citizens who can make a contribution to our economy and our community.

Victoria Middleton

Executive Director, ACLU South Carolina

One of the more unfortunate stories of human history is that those who are in the majority often seek to establish their power by limiting the power of those in the minority. This was true in Jesus' day (see Romans and Jews), it was true in our Jim Crow South and it will likely be true well in the future. What those of us in the majority often miss is how our attempts to build our power by limiting the power of others often ends up hurting us as much as it does those who we discriminate against.

I see this in the opinions of those who feel they must lock their doors and speed through my lower income, predominantly black community. They literally imprison themselves in their

vehicles as they move through a community that is itself imprisoned by crime, low wages, and substandard housing. Because we cannot pay people a living wage in one community, other communities expend extra resources to build gates and guardhouses. Which community is bound? Both are. People of good will must continue to come together to free not just those in the minority but all of us who are bound by our attempts to limit those in that minority. When we do this, we invariably find that our own freedom is increased as well.

The Rev. Bill Stanfield

CEO, Metanoia

The ongoing civil rights issue that I see as a priority is pay equity for women of all races. In South Carolina today white women make 72 cents for every dollar a man in a comparable job makes. Black women make even less, 65 cents, and Hispanic women even less than blacks. It is time to close the wage gap once and for all. If we paid women what they were worth it would create more jobs and generate enough tax revenue to fund state government services. Let women become full citizens and watch how everyone's quality of life will improve.

Jennet Robinson Alterman

Executive Director, Center for Women

The civil rights issue for today is the one no one wants to talk about: equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Americans. At a recent community meeting, the topic was raised concerning the lack of rights for LGBT people — and the room fell silent. These were people whom I knew were personally supportive of family and friends who were gay, yet they held back from naming the discrimination aloud. One courageous person said she wished the subject was one we didn't have to talk about.

The harsh reality is that we must talk about it. Until we stop denying people jobs because they are gay, or denying them housing, or turning them out of hotels and restaurants simply because they love a person of the same gender, until we learn to recognize LGBT citizens' rights to form legally documented relationships and families just like our straight brothers and sisters, civil rights for all Americans will just be words on paper.

Warren Redman-Gress

Executive Director, Alliance For Full Acceptance

The categories of civil rights issues are still mostly the same: education, employment, housing, administration of justice. These are actually just symptoms of the basic condition that we are still two nations (as the Kerner Commission said 40 years ago) and that the African-American "nation" is kept apart by large-scale poverty whose roots go back generations. While average wages for blacks are climbing closer to white wages, the most telling figure is "net worth" — that is, total resources. Average black net worth is less than one-seventh the net worth of whites! Think what that means especially in bad economic times. That difference, rooted in our past, cannot be overcome overnight. The election of a

black president is a sign that we are on the road to real progress, but the road from racial separateness and black poverty to equality is a long one. If we commit ourselves to staying on that road as long as it takes, we will succeed.

Armand Derfner

Civil rights attorney

Health disparities are the civil right issues of the 21st century. Dr. King talk about this in 1965. Most people are not aware that disparities exist. The real history of American medicine and its treatment of blacks should be fully told so that we can learn from it. The question continues to be asked: "Why do blacks distrust the health care system?" If the history of segregation, experimentation and disenfranchisement in the medical community was known, we would understand why. Then perhaps we could address one of the major civil rights issues of the 21 century.

Dr. Thaddeus Bell

General practitioner

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