

Our late friend Lawrence Guyot, a veteran of Freedom Summer, testified at the D.C. Council's marriage equality hearings in 2009 that when he went to work with Fannie Lou Hamer in the Mississippi Delta in 1964, the right to vote on other people's rights was not their purpose. He believed equality was for everyone.

Today, the voting rights he helped win face a renewed onslaught. Gerrymandering and vote suppression aim to preserve the power of the few over the many who sustain and enrich our country. Christian theocrats insist that religious freedom belongs only to them. Women's reproductive choice is threatened at every turn. As our rights are under assault, science is attacked by Know-Nothings. The political alliance between plutocrats and the radical social right has metastasized into a backlash of resentment and intolerance that hamstringing our ability to solve problems and innovate for our future.

We must stand together to prevent our republic from sliding towards oligarchy and feudalism. We cannot remain in separate silos, divided by race, religion, gender, class, immigration status, and sexual orientation. Our lives and bonds cross multiple categories. We must cooperate and learn from one another to secure equality and opportunity for all. *And we must vote.*

Don't Feed the Trolls

Our need to unite and mobilize against threats to American self-governance does not mean we have to run scared. The escalating paranoid rhetoric is in response to our victories. We cannot ignore the craziness—violent words can lead to violent acts—but vigilance needs clarity and resolve, not fear. The following are a few examples of shrill voices whose malign influence we should not overstate just because mainstream media promote controversy over understanding:

American Family Association urges the righteous not to open any mail that has Harvey Milk stamps. We do not doubt their eagerness to grind American commerce to a halt; we just do not see it happening. It's a good bet they'll get over it if they think the envelope contains a check.

Westboro Baptist Church announced protests during Pride. We recommend ignoring the Phelps clan when they show up with their hateful signs. They are widely despised and discredited. If we jump every time they threaten one of their obscene demos, it only encourages them.

Alan Keyes says gay rights spell suicide for the human race. Keyes apparently thinks homosexuality is so irresistible that if gay people are given equal rights, the entire population will turn gay and humanity will die out. This public display of his unresolved family issues is like a horrible traffic accident: you know you shouldn't stare.

Pamela Geller's American Freedom Defense Initiative ran an Islamophobic ad on D.C. Metrobuses. The ad is protected speech and Metro cannot censor it, which in any event would only give Geller cause to play the victim. Our opponents failed to divide the District over marriage equality not because of any ad suppression but because we made the stronger case to our neighbors. The proper response to offensive speech is more speech. It takes positive action to sustain a welcoming environment. Good neighbors are an antidote to provocateurs.

Right-wing pols and pundits have blamed floods, tornadoes, helicopter crashes and mass murders on gay marriage. The God to whom they attribute these punishments is not only cruel and deranged, He has terrible aim. God for them is merely a scourge against people they dislike.

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Confronting Privilege

The radical right's artificial state of siege is based on a sense of aggrieved entitlement. Imagine that you are the proverbial Angry White Man. Who ever promised to supply you with sexually submissive women? Who promised you a secure job or neighbors exactly like you? Who told you families or faiths different from yours were an encroachment on some fiefdom to which you were sole heir? Who guaranteed you would forever be exceptional, the star of every team? Alas, you were sold a bill of goods. We are a diverse society, yet all of us have our struggles and setbacks; instead of taking them out on one another, we gain strength in common cause. The politics of resentment is an old strategy of divide-and-conquer designed to distract you while you are pick-pocketed. Respect and cooperation are much more fruitful.

Be True

The courage of a new generation points the way forward. When Derrick Gordon of UMass became the first gay male NCAA Division 1 basketball player to come out, he told Cyd Zeigler of *Outsports* that he didn't want to live a fake life. When Laverne Cox of "Orange Is the New Black" became the first transgender woman on the cover of *Time* Magazine, she set a life-saving example for young trans folk. By dropping the burden of invisibility, by standing up against stigma and exclusion, we can focus our energies more productively and leave those we encounter better acquainted with the truth of our lives.

Step Up

When Ta-Nehisi Coates recently made "The Case for Reparations" in *The Atlantic*, he was not drafting legislation but detailing a long history of theft against an entire people. Before we can prescribe, we must learn. To be strong, a coalition requires more than singing each other's songs. We must stand in each other's shoes.

Step Out

We are in the midst of an historic cultural shift. Nationwide marriage equality could come as soon as next year. That does not mean we can afford to be complacent. It means we can take our next steps with greater confidence. A game is not won on defense alone. This is a season for seizing opportunities—one of which is revitalizing coalitions. Our interwoven struggles do not live only in legislatures and courtrooms. Each of us takes part through civic and cultural involvement. Today's difficult conversations can open new avenues of cooperation tomorrow.

We secure our freedoms by exercising them—beginning with our right to vote. People died for it. If it made no difference, there would be no effort to suppress it. We can only advance our interests by taking part. Make it an imperative this year, for all your neighbors' sake.

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