

An Open Letter to President Obama

✖ The following is an excerpt from a letter that will be sent this week to President Obama from leaders in the African-American community. Two events have precipitated the writing of this letter.

1. The President hosted a Stonewall Riot 40th anniversary celebration at the White House, when no such meeting has been afforded to African-American clergy.

2. The legal attempt to overthrow the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) that has come out of Massachusetts last week.

All too often, both the press and politicians view the African-American community as a monolithic group that will go wherever the cultural winds blow them. This is not want to express our concerns and be heard. The following letter is an attempt to encourage the president to consider our viewpoint on the redefinition of marriage.

Dear President Obama,

Although you have voiced support for marriage as defined as a union between one man and one woman, we are concerned that your campaign promise to change the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) will work at cross purposes with your pro-marriage stance.

We believe that the central domestic problem we face is the disintegration of marriage. One of the organizations we support called Marriage Savers points out that the marriage crisis is comprised of four elements:

1. A lowering of the marriage rate

▪ The marriage rate has plunged 50 percent since 1970

2. An increase in divorce

- *Half of all new marriages end in divorce*

3. A rise in heterosexual cohabitation

- *The number of unmarried couples living together has soared 12-fold since 1960*

4. A multiplication of unwed births

- *Out-of wedlock births jumped from 5.3 percent to 39.6 percent from 1960-2007*

These statistics show the fragile nature of the institution of marriage today. Changing the definition of marriage will have many unintended consequences, which will hurt generations to come. If one redefines marriage, then the family is redefined. If the family is redefined then the nature of parenting must also be redefined.

We are concerned that an attempt to recognize and adjust to one group's sense of alienation may actually confuse future generations of children about their sexuality and blur lines of responsibility in our families. The very definitions of motherhood and fatherhood may be unnecessarily challenged in years to come.

Same-sex marriage is not a civil right. The laws enacted by Congress during a century of struggle for equal rights for African-Americans were intended to eliminate discrimination on the basis of race, not on the basis of an individual's sexual preferences or personal behavior.

Advocates of same-sex marriage want people to think that it can peacefully coexist alongside traditional marriage. But it will create a conflict between people of faith who fervently believe in traditional marriage and the law, which says marriage includes those of the same-sex variety. Those conflicts will always be resolved in favor of same-sex

marriage because there can be no 'conscientious objectors' to the law.

Mr. President, you say you desire to unify the nation and to change the politics-as-usual status of Washington. We want to believe this statement. As we have looked at both your policies and recent public affirmations, each of us has asked ourselves one question, 'Is there room enough for people like us in President Obama's America?'

Many of the people we speak for felt that your disparaging statements during the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall Riot were directed at them. Some of the people with 'worn out arguments and old attitudes' are not bigots or homophobes; they are our cultural elders, who are rightfully saying, 'Don't tear down a fence until you understand why it's there.' Recent studies show that there is a resurgence of hope about marriage among the young people of this generation. Mr. President, let's keep hope alive.

We also stated that the California Proposition 8 votes amending the state's constitution to protect marriage marked the beginning of a new era in American politics. For the first time in recent history, black and Hispanic voters (predominately Christians) voted for President Obama and simultaneously voted against the Democratic power structure on this social issue. In light of this phenomenon occurring simultaneously within the black and Hispanic communities, we respectfully warned the president that hooking his political wagon too closely to the gay marriage bandwagon could precipitously erode public confidence in his administration.

If you agree with our concern about marriage, it's time for you to start contacting both Republican and Democratic congressmen. Congress is where the battle concerning the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) will likely be fought. Importantly, many Republicans are shying away from this important social issue. Conversely, the Democratic Party

(generally speaking) seems to be beholding to the gay marriage movement because of its financial support in the last election.

Therefore, we must let each congressman know that he can be voted out of office if he moves the wrong way on this issue. Set aside Mondays to e-mail, write or call your congressman and tell them to support marriage and to protect DOMA. Let's make "Marriage Monday" a national movement.

The letter outlined above was signed by Niger Innis of the Congress on Racial Equality, Dr. William Owens, Sr. of Concerned African-American Pastors, Bishop Dale Bronner of Word of Faith Family Worship Center in Atlanta, Ga., Terry Millender pastor of Victorious Life Church in Alexandria, Va., and myself.

If you would like to read the letter in its entirety, go to our Web site .