



# U n c i v i l l i z e d

## V a l u e s

In a society where notions of identity are flexible and any question is fair game, the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy broaches the anachronistic. Beyond the hypocrisy and inappropriateness, it also exacts a heavy toll on our nation. Isn't it time we changed the rules to allow each citizen his or her right to be heard?

*"Sexual orientation will not be a bar to service unless manifested by homosexual conduct. The military will discharge members who engage in homosexual conduct, which is defined as a homosexual act, a statement that the member is homosexual or bisexual, or a marriage or attempted marriage to someone of the same gender."*

— quoted in "The Pentagon's New Policy Guidelines on Homosexuals in the Military," *The New York Times* (July 20, 1993), p. A14.

Soon after his inauguration as 42nd President of the United States and leader of the free world, Bill Clinton, aware of the new position's attendant responsibility, attempted to fulfill one of his campaign promises: to replace the existing ban on homosexuals in the military and allow openly homosexual individuals to serve. The new law would have made it legal to be an openly homosexual service-member, and illegal to discriminate against these members. Indeed, it would have made it illegal to even use a recruit's sexual orientation as a factor in their approval to serve.

Instead of nullifying this institutionalized discrimination, a "compromise" measure was passed by Colin Powell and Congress, and for the past 15 years, the military has operated under this policy referred to as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue." The proposed compromise basically said that gay and lesbian individuals could join the military at any level (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines), but could not disclose their sexual orientation to anyone on or off-base, lest face the threat of being discharged, often dishonorably. The general assumption is that if no one "asks" someone about their sexual orientation, and that person doesn't "tell," then the issues of discrimination and harassment could be avoided.

Incidentally, it is also not an option to lie because that would violate the military's code of conduct requiring honesty and integrity in all actions and behavior. The only true "compromise" point included from Clinton's original proposal was the elimination of heterosexuality as a requisite for enlistment and the barring of pressuring a recruit to reveal their sexual orientation.

To the contrary, all this policy has managed to do is allay immediate fears over the rapid integration of homosexual individuals into the military — and therefore, the cultural fabric of American society really? I don't think the military is a pretty segregated institution from the rest of society and doesn't have a huge effect on identity for those who are completely uninvolved — in exchange for the marginalization of an entire group of American citizens. Homosexuals in the military have since been silenced to such an extent that they are denied identity. Although called a compromise, it reads like a veiled condemnation of homosexuality couched in the supportive and protective rhetoric of a benefactor, and when enforced, has the effect of legalizing prejudice and legitimizing deep-seeded stereotypes.

It is often difficult for people, from any side of the debate, to approach this issue objectively. For many of us that have little or no experience with the inner workings of the military, other than benefiting from the security a large military provides us with, it is easy to accept the prejudicial terms, as they seem to fall in line with the myriad other dehumanizing aspects of the military. Yet, when people are fighting and dying for the well being of our country, it is simply unacceptable to allow prejudice to quietly flourish amongst people who are sacrificing their lives. What would happen if such a law singled out heterosexuals in the military, wherein they had to hide who they were while homosexual members could live openly and honestly?

Imagine men and women at boot camp or hunkered down in their camps between firefights, unable to share the letters and photos sent in care packages from home. Imagine them seeing wedding rings on the fingers of fellow soldiers and

It is patently unfair, small-minded, and indefensible in a civilized society to discriminate against a perfectly civilized minority. However, asking human beings to kill other human beings as we do in the military is far from civil behavior, and makes it difficult to enforce a moral stance when the vast majority don't want it.

watching others show children's pictures proudly, while they themselves suppress their anxiety at knowing that if they were to marry their boyfriend or girlfriend back home, their new spouse wouldn't be acknowledged, much less covered, by military regulation of health or death benefits, and they couldn't tell anyone about the marriage or else they would be fired. Imagine discovering that only same-sex couples serving together abroad would be eligible for personal trailers in a special section of camp, while all you have are phone calls with clandestine words of affection and inherently silent emails home. Imagine hiding who you are and who you love — two significant aspects of the human psyche that contribute to a healthy, strong, and able human being — simply because other people don't consider it valid. Now, after imagining all this, how can anyone truthfully say that homosexual servicemen — and women — do not deserve the same rights as their peers? After requiring them to serve, fight, and die as part of the "army of one," how can anyone dare insist that anyone is any different, any less deserving of respect and basic dignity, than anyone else? Can we honestly expect them to go out there thinking they are fighting for our country's freedoms when we don't even respect them enough to let them share in them?

Interestingly, new legislation is now being seriously proposed to repeal the 1993 law. In May of this year, the Military Readiness Enhancement Act was introduced, aiming at completely overturning the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" policy in favor of supporting the service of openly gay and lesbian individuals in all areas of the U.S. military. Senior military officials, including former Joint Chief of Staffs and 143 of the highest ranking veterans in Congress, voiced their support and stated that when it comes to serving well and honorably in combat, sexual orientation doesn't matter. The California Supreme Court also weighed in, but on the citizen level, adding a new chapter to the equal rights effort in May 2008 by overturning existing legislation banning legal recognition of same-sex civil unions in the state. The new ruling was then supported by California's governor, making it the first state to successfully disregard sexual orientation as a

by Heather Chin

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*("Uncivilized Values" continued from page 61)*

barrier to citizen's right to the pursuit of happiness and their Constitutional right to free expression.

Instead of removing inequalities and ending discrimination, the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" law undermines the principles it claims to be trying to uphold: honor, integrity, and respect. By attempting to make homosexuality a non-issue, the U.S. government, military, and people have silenced both themselves and those targeted. In a society full of different identities, embracing sexual mores that hadn't even been acknowledged before, it is time we changed the rules so that all citizens have the right to be heard. We are in a world full of change. For 15 years, silence was the law of the land, but discussion continued over the airwaves. Modern pop culture became interwoven with political and economic issues, opening minds and raising tolerance levels. Both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama agree and have declared their support of repealing the "Don't Ask" ban (John McCain has insisted that he would keep the law as is). And as the moral of an oft-quoted poem (recently referenced by 2008 presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in a campaign stump speech) notes, an attack on one group is an attack on everyone in that society; the urge to ignore what's going on is futile since once one group is preyed on, another will follow, until eventually the next group includes you. Perhaps changing the policy will help transform society. Maybe the struggle won't be so long in coming after all.

It's remarkable – and disheartening – to see that many people, including the upper echelons of our government, still have yet to understand that forced silence never succeeds in actual silencing of a controversial opinion or problem, no matter how much someone hopes, wishes, even prays, that it will.



*("Do The Right Thing II" continued from page 139)*

Affirmative action is, like many political institutions, confusing, controversial and largely and innately amorphous. Created in the 60s to insure the utilization of educated women and minorities in the workplace, affirmative action has since evolved into a system of quotas and percentages. To be specific, we'll reference Harvard's equal opportunity policies as outlined in its 2007 Affirmative Action Plan. It clearly states: "Affirmative action has a central premise that an employer's workforce, over time, will reflect the gender, racial, and ethnic profile of the labor pools from which the employer recruits and hires, in the absence of discrimination." In layman's terms, Harvard will hire people based on race and gender in efforts to make its faculty as diverse as the pool of qualified applicants that exist. Free of "discrimination," of course.

If you haven't yet fallen asleep, you might have realized that several things were just implied. The well-intentioned hiring policy aims to eliminate any "ist" tendencies that wayward old-school officials might have to hire a well-bred Caucasian man over his equally qualified minority counterpart. Sounds lovely. Except, "qualified" isn't quite spelled out.

Who is qualified? Maybe a Harvard alumnus has no problem defining such a simple word, but the term stumped the admissions board of The Medical School of the University of California and divided Supreme Justices in 1978. In the Supreme Court Case Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, Allan Bakke (a Caucasian applicant) was refused admission twice although his scores and grades were higher than the minorities who were admitted through a special affirmative action program at the school. He sued, and won, but afterwards one of the Justices who had voted in his favor stated that factoring race and gender into admission practices was justified under law. No clear precedent was set.

The point is, "qualified" can be manipulated, and educated candidates can be dismissed for their inferior fellow candidates based on race to meet standardized quotas. This undermines the original intention of affirmative action altogether! And what do these intentions include? One can generalize: to reverse the effects of detrimental hiring and acceptance patterns among institutions due to racism and sexism, to pay reparations to those affected by race and gender based oppressions (think civil rights), and work towards a truly equal-opportunity playing field. Now we must ask ourselves: is affirmative action, as it is executed in today's society, fulfilling its original intentions?

Connerly answers this question with a resounding "No." He believes that minority groups now have the ability to reach any economic class they choose. According to Connerly, affirmative action perpetuates racial boundaries. Not only does it undermine the abilities of minorities, it creates a slew of associations within societal mind between minorities and handicaps. How can our country

expect any group of people to advance when we are continually labeling them as incapable and dependent on public assistance? A society that strives towards equality cannot do so if its laws are engineered to pigeonhole races and genders into different class systems.

At this point, believers might point out that there are years and legacies to account for. To pay reparation for. To reverse. And simply put, they're right. But a closer look at our national student body reveals a flaw in affirmative action's master design. Black students made up 8% of the undergraduate class at Harvard in 2004. By principal, this 8% would consist of black citizens who had been negatively affected by the history of race relations in this country. Affirmative action would have allowed them an educational opportunity that they might not have otherwise had. At the 2004 Harvard reunion of black alumni, however, it was voiced that affirmative action was not helping the people it was meant to. The majority of Harvard's 8 percent was comprised of West Indian and African immigrants and descendants, leaving a mere possible 3 percent of the school who had been accepted by affirmative action. And this is not to say that they would not have been accepted even without the help of affirmative action.

Hypothetically speaking, who makes up this 3 percent? Christopher Edly, the White House assistant put in charge of President Clinton's review of affirmative action policy in 1994-5, noted that during the long debates that he and his coworkers held about the issue, their discussion kept returning to the "coal miner's son" question. Basically, if two men of equal "qualifications" are up for a position, and the white candidate is a son of a coal miner, while the black is the son of a neurosurgeon, is it still right to favor the black candidate in efforts to reverse any disadvantages he might have had? Where does the real disadvantage live, in race or in economic status? In an interview with ABC News, Obama said, "I think that my daughters should probably be treated by any [college] admissions officer as folks who are pretty advantaged. We should take into account white kids who have been disadvantaged and have grown up in poverty and shown themselves to have what it takes to succeed."

We are lucky to live in a time when race and gender and class are distinguishable categories. And we must start treating them as such. "I've been, saying for a number of years that the American people are not institutionally racist," said Connerly. "And Obama's strong support among white voters proves it." Affirmative action assumes that all Blacks are poor, and that all women are incapable of equal employment. Then it mandates idiotic systems of reverse racism and sexism as if to prove it. Ward Connerly argues that as long as we allow for affirmative action policies, we continue to undermine our own capacity for progress. And I agree with him. **M**