The Fierce Urgency of Now

November 14, 2008 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

The LGBT grassroots protests nationwide have inspired me. I'll be attending the New York City rally tomorrow. I hope that "the fierce urgency of now" will finally guide the LGBT civil rights movement.

President-elect Obama often invoked during the presidential campaign that famous phrase from the "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King Jr. Delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, the speech was the defining moment of the 1963 March on Washington.

Here is an excerpt from the speech that puts the phrase in context:

> When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
>
> It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check which

has come back marked “insufficient funds.”

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check?a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism.

Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of God’s children. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.

And so is revealed the ultimate division at this moment in the LGBT civil rights movement?“the fierce urgency of now” versus “the tranquilizing drug of gradualism.”

It’s clear which path Dr. King and President-elect Obama chose to follow. The coming weeks will determine which path the LGBT civil rights movement will follow.

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