



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
NORTH CAROLINA STATE CONFERENCE

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Acceptance Statement

Only 22 years ago, I was limited to a wheelchair and walker, and I could not fly. Thanks to my doctors, my wife and five children, prayer partners, hundreds of friends who have helped me face and deal with my disabilities, I can now fly. But I have to get on an airplane with special extra room seating to do it. Last night because of storms in the east, I missed my flight to San Francisco leaving New York. So I must address you electronically.

A preacher—particularly a one like me who opens his soul, mind, heart and mouth to speak the words of Almighty God—needs to see, needs to hear, needs to get a lively back-and-forth call-and-response in her or his congregation. I'm stuck on the East Coast today, and our electronic technology is not good enough to allow me to show my love for your long history of social justice work of Public Advocates, and I cannot get a sense of your spirits tonight. I wish I could be with you at the Annual Voices of Conscience Celebration. I wish I could shake hands with, and congratulate the Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organizations, which you are also honoring tonight. Public Advocates was formed in 1971, by a group of progressive lawyers and activists, and carefully melding the constitution and the many important civil rights laws that were passed during the 1960's, with the growing anti-racism, anti-sexism, and anti-homophobic movements that courageous activists built during what we call the Second Reconstruction. You have set a model for fighting systemic exploitation, racism, classism, oppression and discrimination with grass-roots organizing, strong public educational work, and surgical litigation that supports the grass-roots work. In North Carolina, we often say:

A Movement of moral dissent is necessary now. Somebody must stand and say it doesn't matter what party is in power, who has a political supermajority. There are some things that transcend political majorities and mere majority politics and the narrow categories of liberal vs. conservative. There are some things that must be challenged because they are wrong, extreme, and immoral. We must heed the call of the past hymn writer:

Go out and tell our story.
Let it echo far and wide.
Make them hear you,
Make them hear you.

How justice was our battle
And how justice was denied.
Make them hear you,

Make them hear you.

And say to those who blame us
For the way we chose to fight
That sometimes there are battles
That are more than black or white...
And I could not put down my sword
When justice was my right.
Make them hear you.

We need a moral Movement across the nation. An indigenously homegrown, state-based, state government-focused, deeply moral, deeply constitutional, anti-racist, anti-poverty, pro-justice, pro-labor, transformative, Fusion Movement. A Movement that is about the moral fabric of our society guided by a deeply moral and constitutional vision of what is possible; where we build relationships that are long-term, not based on one issue or campaign; where we challenge the greatest myth of our times, that extreme policies only hurt a small subset of people, such as people of color. These policies harm us all.

We need a Movement that understands we cannot afford to be ahistorical. Anti-racism and anti-poverty work must always remain at the heart of our struggle. We need a moral Movement guided by our deeper faith tradition and values: A Movement of grassroots organizing across every state. A Movement of civil disobedience strategy when needed. A Movement of voter registration and education. A Movement of strong constitutional legal strategy. A Movement of transformative long-term coalition relationships. Yes, it is a necessity for the destiny of our democracy that we realize we have to look at policy through the moral lens of justice for all and through the constitutional principle of the common good. Keeping millions of poor people from seeing a doctor when they are sick is not just bad policy; it is immoral and hypocritical in the face our deepest faith values and constitutional dream. Kicking hard-working people who lost jobs through no fault of their own off of unemployment benefits to give tax cuts to the very wealthy is not just bad policy; it's immoral. Trying to undermine public education and give tax dollars to private school owners is immoral and hypocritical in the face of our deepest faith values and constitutional dream. It's immoral to deny workers a living wage and to destroy the right to collective bargaining. It's immoral to sing America, America, God shed his grace on thee, but then to deny that grace to women, immigrants, those who want marriage rights, and those whose families are being torn apart by poverty.

We say we will fight the oppressive systems and its advocates in the streets, in the courts, and at the ballot box. And We Will Win!

I accept the Public Advocates Award this evening on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of people who have gotten involved in the Moral Monday Movement in North Carolina and in at least 15 (and growing) other states. All of us stand in solidarity with the work you do, and I know we will meet in person soon.

Love, Peace, And Justice,
Forward Together, Not One Step Back!

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II