

Is gay rights equivalent to '60s civil rights struggle?

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"We oppose attempts to equate homosexuality with civil rights or compare it to benign characteristics such as skin color or place of origin," says a Web site from the conservative Family Research Council.

Meanwhile, civil rights luminaries such as Julian Bond, board chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and Rep. John Lewis, one of the organizers of the 1963 march on Washington, have spoken on the side of gay marriage.

Bond said he supports "gay civil or religious marriage."

"Discrimination is discrimination - no matter who the victim is, and it is always wrong," he told The Associated Press. "There are no 'special rights' in America, despite the attempts by many to divide blacks and the gay community with the argument that the latter are seeking some imaginary 'special rights' at the expense of blacks."

Lewis filed a friend-of-the-court brief in the Massachusetts case that led to the first unequivocal state

ruling recognizing same-sex marriage.

In its November decision, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court cited the landmark school desegregation case, *Brown v. Board of Education*. The first same-sex marriage licenses are scheduled to be issued there May 17 - the 50th anniversary of *Brown*.

The Rev. Joseph Lowery agrees that American blacks should clearly sympathize with the gay community's fight for rights.

But Lowery, who founded

the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with

Martin Luther King Jr., said the sheer weight of U.S. his-

tory precludes too close a comparison.

South African corporate boards remain overwhelmingly white

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become one of its most difficult challenges.

New laws set targets for black employment and ownership, give preference to black-owned or -managed companies for government contracts, and require industry to train people denied opportunities under apartheid.

Today, almost half of the richest 15 percent of South Africans are black or Asian. But while the number of top black executives has grown, the business world remains largely white and male.

Black entrepreneurs who want to start their own businesses say they struggle to get financing. Few have management or business experience, and many say racism remains widespread.

"People think the services they get from black companies are inferior," says Mosiako, who gets 70 percent of his business from the government. "You have to work twice as hard to prove to a customer that you can deliver."

More serious is the failure so far of the government's Black Economic Empowerment program to create jobs - a pressing need in a country where more than 30 percent are unemployed, most of them black.

"We've always said Black Economic Empowerment is a growth strategy," said Nolutha Fakude, president of the Black Management Forum, an influential professional association. "But at the end of the day, we haven't succeeded in that."

Government and business leaders have touted a few high-profile transactions, in which black executives have

bought stakes in major companies like mining giants Harmony Gold and Anglo American.

But many of the deals involve a handful of prominent black businessmen with strong ties to the governing party, like former ANC provincial premier Tokyo Sexwale and its former secretary-general, Cyril Ramaphosa. Both are now among the country's wealthiest men.

"It creates an impression that they're creating new entrepreneurs, when actually they're not. They're just financing the transfer of assets from one group to another group," said Moeletsi Mbeki, brother of Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki, and a critic of the way government has implemented its empowerment program.

Meanwhile, millions of blacks remain mired in poverty. Lesia Matonsela walks each day from her shack in the Johannesburg squatter camp Thembelilhe to a nearby white suburb in search of odd jobs to feed her five children.

"They are rich, but they don't help us," she complained angrily of the new black elite. "They have forgotten about us."

The government argues that transferring ownership of companies will help break the link between wealth and race and create a new class of black entrepreneurs. But even measured against this standard, progress has been slow.

In 2002, fewer than 30 of the about 450 companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange had significant black ownership,

according to the BusinessMap Foundation, which researches empowerment. And those companies accounted for only 3 percent of the exchange's total value.

Brothers celebrate their special talents

Both Taylor, age 12 and his brother Tyquante, age 10 live an active life. They like swimming, skating, playing video games and watching cartoons. On this special day they take time out to just hang together.

Today, we honor and celebrate the lives of these handsome brothers and recognize their special talents, which include drawing and singing. Both Taylor and Tyquante are also avid readers.

Taylor's favorite series of books is Harry Potter and Tyquante's favorite book is Curious George.



Taylor and Tyquante are two of many children waiting to be adopted in Mecklenburg County.

not only in his eye but also in his heart. He is very sweet and lovable."

One thing both boys share in common is their desire for an adoptive family. Taylor and Tyquante live in foster care. They have never lived apart and want to be adopted into the same family. If you are interested in finding out more about these boys or other children awaiting adoption, call Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services at 704-336-KIDS (5437).

"Taylor's most endearing qualities are his smile and his witty behavior," says long-time friend

Christine O'Brien. "Tyquante has a sparkle



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