

Congresswoman Barbara Lee
January 12, 2007
Statement for Louisiana Winter Students Event for MLK Day

Hello and thank you all for organizing today's events around an American hero, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

I am so impressed by your passion and your commitment to re-create the Mississippi Summer Actions of the 60's Civil Right's Movement into a modern day Louisiana Winter of our MODERN - DAY Civil Right's Movement.

Young people were the life-blood of the civil rights movement and so are you today in our movement for human rights and justice for all.

I would like to say a special thank you to Victory Chavez, Roshell Jackson-Smarr, Jenette Roayne and Selena Acox for all of their leadership and hard-work to organize today's event.

Today is a very special day, in front of a very special school, and it gives me great pleasure to lend my support to you.

We are here today to not simply to remember the legacy of Dr. King, but to recommit ourselves to his ideals and explore how we must carry forward his legacy each and every day—throughout our country—starting in the areas ravaged by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"Louisiana Winter", is a powerful theme.

In considering the theme of "Louisiana Winter," I began to think of the many students during the Mississippi Summers—who were organizing for justice. The fight for justice, and the basic right to

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vote, was truly life or death during that time. And many had to give their lives for our rights today.

If you've never had to deal with difficulty, you probably don't know much about strength.

But there are troubled waters and then there are troubled waters. There are ripples, and the kind that capsize your boat. There are the kind you can wade across, and the kind that you must build a bridge to cross. Dr. King warned us about these sorts of troubled waters, in particular the triple evils of war, poverty and racism.

Answering that call is why we are all here today, and I want to talk to you about building bridges over the troubled waters of poverty and racism, and how drawing on our diversity is critical if we are going to bring about justice.

Remember, Dr. King said that peace is not just the absence of tension, but the presence of justice.

Today, the waters are troubled here in the Gulf and we must do something to calm them.

The areas ravaged by Hurricane Katrina must be a priority for all Americans—in Congress and throughout the United States.

It is our moral obligation to acknowledge that there have always been two America's here in the United States; and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita lifted the curtain on the connection of race and poverty.

It just does not make sense that the richest, most powerful nation in the world has some of the poorest, unhealthy, and vulnerable people in the world.

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I am personally vested in eradicating the poverty across this country-particularly in the Gulf Coast and support increasing funding and job opportunities for our brothers and sisters trying to rebuild their lives.

We must couple housing with social services like counseling, affordable and accessible health care, and basic job training.

And in the longer term, we must not forget institutional racism and the role access to institutions plays in separating our society.

As wealthy as America is, there is no room for poverty. If we are to bring about justice, we must build a **BRIDGE** over the widening divide in our nation between those who have and those who have not, a bridge that gives meaning to the idea of justice by opening the door of opportunity for all to pass through.

Thank you and I support your efforts today and in the future to restore the Gulf Coast region.

Congresswoman Barbara Lee