

Has America outlived civil rights? No way

By Julian Bond
Special to Sentinel-Voice

If you think, as many do, we're in a post civil rights period where discrimination and bigotry have been vanquished as ugly artifacts of a long-ago past, think again. And read the United States Supreme Court's frightening decision in Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. Ledbetter involved a woman — Lilly Ledbetter, the rare woman in her job category at an Alabama factory — who sued her employer for wage discrimination after years in which her paycheck was smaller than her male colleagues received for doing the same work.

She won a jury verdict on her claim, and the jury found it "more likely than not that [Goodyear] paid an unequal salary because of her sex." But the federal Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit — disagreeing with every other appellate court which had considered the issue — reversed, saying she had sued too late, even though she continued to receive lower pay. The Supreme Court, by a 5-4 vote, upheld that decision.

Under Title VII, the nation's premier anti-discrimination civil rights law, "a charge of discrimination must be filed within 180 days after the alleged unlawful practice occurred." But the 11th Circuit — and now a majority of the Supreme Court — has held that Lilly Ledbetter cannot recoup any pay lost because of discrimination because she did not sue when she was first victimized by receiving lower pay.

As *The New York Times* noted, "Bizarrely, the majority insisted it did not matter that Goodyear was still paying her far less than her male counterparts when she filed her complaint." Lilly Ledbetter is just one person, but the Court has given a free pass to all employers who discriminate in how much they pay their workers — women, Blacks, Asians, Hispanics, ev-



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everyone. The Ledbetter decision weakened a major civil rights law and weakened opportunities for victims of pay discrimination to seek relief in the courts.

In recent past decades, racial minorities and other victims of bias looked to the Supreme Court as a true court of last resort. When appeals to legislatures and lower courts had been rejected, the Supreme Court offered solace and relief.

That haven has vanished as the Court has been overtaken by hardened conservative jurists who prefer prejudice to precedent. In Ledbetter, the court ignored years of its own interpretations that would have corrected the wrong Lilly Ledbetter suffered for many years.

This decision is an unwelcome harbinger of likely outcomes in two pending school-choice cases from Seattle and Louisville. The issue in these cases is whether voluntary integration plans can be adopted to rescue minority children from segregated schools and give majority children a chance to learn with others different from them.

And this decision should signal to those who thought they were basking in the warm afterglow of the civil rights past a sharp wake-up call. That past is still very much with us.

Congress can and should change the law to correct the Supreme Court's errors in Ledbetter. The NAACP will help lead the charge. And we should keep Lilly Ledbetter in mind when we vote next year — laws and courts do count, and elections help choose the people who make laws and who sit on courts. Civil rights past? We're living in a harsh civil rights present — just ask Lilly Ledbetter.

Julian Bond is chairman of the NAACP board of directors, a Distinguished Scholar in the School of Government at American University in Washington, D.C., and a professor of history at the University of Virginia.

Bee disappearance could be worrisome

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

If you thought that you had enough to worry about, here goes one more thing: honey bees are disappearing around the world. Now, you may say "ho... humm... I don't care much for honey anyway." Wrong response!

Honey bees are essential for pollination, which means that approximately a third of the food supply is in danger. No one knows why this problem is occurring or why bees are deserting their hives, but it could spell trouble with a capitol "T."

As much as I would love to blame this directly and solely on President Bush, in good conscience, I cannot. Nevertheless, the crisis with the honey bees does raise some larger questions about the priorities, not only of the USA but of capitalist countries. Resources that should be dedicated to finding an answer to questions, such as, what is happening to these bees, or for that matter, questions about how to address environmental deterioration, do not seem to be there. Yet billions of dollars are found for the Iraq war!

Leaving aside a doomsday scenario, the disappearance of the bees could also further fuel what are being called resource wars. Consider that planet Earth is running out of drinkable water. If the bees' situation is not reversed, we could be looking at a dramatic drop in food supplies and, consequently, starvation.

And hovering in the background is the question of energy availability. The situation is such that the Pentagon has been planning on military measures to address the stresses that will inevitably arise around resources; stresses that are inevitable — unless something dramatic is done to shift domestic and global priorities.

As I indicated, it would be much easier to blame this on one evil person. That would be comforting. All we would have to do is to wait him out and put someone



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else in. The problem, however, is far deeper. It is a problem that is rooted in an economic system that prioritizes profits, gains and the uncontrollable use of the planet's resources, irrespective of the consequences. Our economic system seems to have an unquenchable thirst for fossil fuels, and it is experimenting with genetically modified foods, as well as genetically-modified weaponry, while the living standards — and living conditions — for the average person increasingly deteriorate.

It would never have occurred to me — beyond the realm of science fiction — that bees could or would disappear. There are certain things one takes for granted. Yet the ravages of our economic system seem to be taking their toll on Mother Nature. She may be commencing a counterattack which could be quite deadly for humanity.

So, here is where I will blame the man in the White House: the evidence is in and it is decisive that something in the environment is going extremely badly and that human activity — largely because of our economic system — is largely to blame. Yet, the best we seem to get out of this president are halfhearted sound bites. He is not even offering to "feel our pain."

Social and economic priorities do not change on their own. Societies do, however, collapse on their own — unless a counterforce is introduced to halt the collapse or to build something new. I don't know about you, but I am not ready for the ultimate curtain call. The time to act is now. Denial, despair and procrastination have no place in the 21st century. So, maybe you and I need to be part of building that counterforce. For sure, I want those bees back in their hives buzzing away.

Bill Fletcher Jr. is an international labor activist and immediate past president of the TransAfrica Forum.

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say to you that you're not treating His children right. And we've come by here to ask you to make the first item on your agenda fair treatment where God's children are concerned. Now, if you are not prepared to do that, we do have an agenda that we must follow. And our agenda calls for withdrawing economic support from you.

"And so, as a result of this, we are asking you tonight, to go out and tell your neighbors not to buy Coca-Cola in Memphis. Go by and tell them not to buy Sealtest milk. Tell them not to buy — what is the other bread? — Wonder Bread. And what is the other bread company, Jesse? Tell them not to buy Hart's bread. As Jesse Jackson has said, up to now, only the garbage men have been feeling pain; now we must kind of redistribute the pain.

"We are choosing these companies because they haven't been fair in their hiring policies; and we are choosing them because

they can begin the process of saying, they are going to support the needs and the rights of these men who are on strike. And then they can move on downtown and tell Mayor Loeb to do what is right."

Can't you see what King was doing? Can't you see how his words are instructions for us today? Can't you see that we must use the power of withdrawing our dollars, not for just a day, but for the long haul.

Spread that pain, not only within the local industry but in entertainment, restaurants, recreation, and the like. As many people as possible should feel the bite of gas price-gouging.

Organize an effort and refuse to purchase gas at just a few local stations, especially those that are corporate-owned, and watch what happens.

James E. Clingman is an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati's African American Studies department.

NAACP to honor Rep. Conyers with 92nd Spingarn Medal

Special to Sentinel-Voice

(NNPA) - NAACP Board of Directors has named U.S. Rep. John Conyers Jr., D-Mich., as the 92nd recipient of the Spingarn Medal, the NAACP's highest honor. Conyers, chair of the U.S. House Judiciary Committee, will receive the award during the 98th NAACP National Convention in Detroit on July 12.

"John Conyers' record of service is unparalleled and speaks volumes," said NAACP Board Chairman

Julian Bond in a statement. "He has been an extraordinary advocate and consistent supporter of civil rights and civil liberties and a major ally of the NAACP's agenda. He has suffered and survived many attacks from extremists, but has always stood strong in the cause of equality for all Americans. He is one of the legislative giants of our time."

Conyers, who has been re-elected 20 times, totaling 40 years, is the longest serving member of Congress. He is

one of the 13 founding members of the Congressional Black Caucus, and is nicknamed "the dean" of the 39-year-old CBC.

His legislative career is specifically known for his fight for reparations for enslavement of African-Americans and against police profiling.

His Judiciary Committee work involves advancing civil liberties, ensuring equal protection and access to voting and combating violence against women.