

*Good morning America how are you?  
Don't you know me I'm your native son, (and daughters)  
I'm the train they call The City of New Orleans,  
I'll be gone five hundred miles when the day is done.*

“City of New Orleans” is a famous folk song composed by the Chicago singer-songwriter Steve Goodman. Goodman wrote the lyrics on a piece of paper after his wife fell asleep on the Illinois Central train, as they were going from Chicago to New Orleans to visit his wife's family. Goodman wrote about what he saw looking out the windows of the train as it “rolled along past houses, farms and fields”. The lyrics are great poetry and there’s a line in the song that says “*all along the southbound odyssey, the train pulls out at Kankakee*”. I was born and raised in *Kankakee* and I know exactly what he’s trying to say in this song.

Now when I first heard that Doane College was going to be picketed by the Westboro Baptist Church---because one of our students had the courage to write an article on Doaneline in support of people who only want their love for each other respected and recognized, I thought of this great song.

You see—the popularity of this song in American culture is not because we are all fascinated with trains—but rather because it is a powerful metaphor for our American Odyssey—our journey. It touches us somewhere deep inside. The song asks us “How are you America? How are things going for you at this moment? It forces us think about what makes us who we are—and what we value in our lives. And that is the major reason we stand here together today.

We gather here today in celebration of our diversity. And to support those who seek to love and respect one another, and to oppose those who seek to hate and defame each other.

We gather here today to support those who seek peaceful and non-violent solutions to our differences and to oppose those who seek to impose their views through force and violence.

And last but not least we gather here today to reaffirm our commitment to equality.

Now I've heard there is another smaller gathering across the street. Well--pay no mind to what's going on over there, for it is just a sad side show our proud history as a great people. Our gathering today in Cassel Theater is the main event—the main stage—for our performance as free and compassionate people. Make no doubt about it—Doane College is standing on the right side of history today.

A little over 200 years ago Thomas Jefferson wrote the words “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”.

Today we re-affirm our commitment to these words, keeping in mind that each generation of Americans must do their part to ensure the arrival of that day, when these “dreams” become a reality for all Americans. I'm optimistic and you should be as well. We are making progress on many fronts. And nobody ever said it was going to be easy.

In the 1860's Abraham Lincoln led us through a Civil War that resulted in passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment formally abolishing slavery throughout the United States.

In 1879, Ponca Indian Chief Standing Bear, sued the Government for detaining him as a prisoner for leaving the reservation. In the trial Chief Standing Bear challenged the government's position that he is not a 'person' like the rest of us and hence was not entitled to any rights. He raised his right hand in court and said, "That hand is not the color of yours, but if I prick it, the blood will flow, and I shall feel pain,"

"The blood is of the same color as yours. God made me, and I am a man." In a landmark ruling the Judge agreed that "an Indian is a person" and under the law entitled to the same rights and protection as everyone else in America.

In 1920, and after several generations of woman suffrage, Congress ratified the 19th amendment guaranteeing all American women the right to vote.

In 1964, after years of protests from African-Americans and their supporters, the landmark Civil Rights Act was passed by Congress outlawing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national

origin ending such injustices as separate water fountains, restrooms and segregated schools.

And so here we are again, standing at yet another cross roads in this American Odyssey. We once again have the opportunity to reaffirm and honor Jefferson's soaring rhetoric that we are all created equally. And this time do so by extending those "unalienable Rights" to those in our society they remain denied, based on sexual orientation.

The people of the United States will eventually determine through the legislative and judicial process whether or not to extend the 'rights' for same-sex marriage to others among us. And each of you as individuals in a democratic free society has the right and the responsibility to peacefully contribute to this debate, discussion and ultimate decision. That's how we do it in America.

It is unlikely that either our gathering today in Cassel Theatre or the hate filled protests across the street will determine the outcome of this national debate. This question must play out on the national stage. But what I can guarantee is that our students, faculty and staff will not be silent on the issue of hate, bigotry and discrimination of any kind. And

we will conduct ourselves with hearts filled with love and a capacity for forgiveness. And we will show courage and stand oppose to those whose hearts are unforgiving and filled with hate towards people simply because they are different.

Let us always remember that Doane College is first and fore-most committed to the well-being of all our students and to the quality of their educational experience. And that we support each and every student equally in their pursuit of learning regardless of their age, race, gender, religion, culture, national origins or sexual orientation.

And especially given the focus of today's rally, we want all our students, whether they are straight, gay, bisexual, lesbian, transgender or questioning, to know that everyone is welcomed here.

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