‘Racial fault lines’ still divide U.S.

Speaking at Massasotl, Julian Bond attacks conservative efforts to dismantle affirmative action.

By Mike Readton

BROCKTON - NAACP National Chairman Julian Bond proved that he is still a civil rights firebrand as he lashed out Friday at conservative efforts to roll back gains of the past century in racial, gender and economic equality.

Bond, 58, who was elected in February to chair the NAACP, spoke for about 45 minutes at Massasotl Community College in front of about 500 people.

"Racism is alive and well in America these days," Bond said. "Clear racial fault lines seem to divide American society as much as it ever has."

Affirmative action and other gains in civil rights have become "the new Evil Empire" for conservatives since the fall of the Soviet Union, Bond said. The goals, motives and effectiveness of affirmative action programs have been distorted by those who are seeking to destroy them, he said.

Bond got a laugh when he said, "The ancient forces of evil are appearing now in new forms." He said the Republican Party has become "the white people's party" and the conservative movement "a crazed swarm of right-wing locusts."

"Programs such as affirmative action have opened doors to let in people previously shut out of the job market," Bond said. "It has created a sizable middle class," he added.

According to Bond, white parents complain that affirmative action is favoritism, but are silent when white students get into college because their fathers are alumni and get jobs because their fathers are company executives.

Bond said he finds fun at the hypocrisy of conservative Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who he said got where he is thanks in large part to affirmative action. Thomas is an opponent of affirmative-action programs.

"Ever since he got his affirmative action job, he's been in a foul mood," Bond said.

Bond compared the present climate of race relations in the United States to that of the turn of the century, when his..."

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JULIAN BOND, national chairman of the NAACP, speaks to a large crowd at Massasotl Community College Friday afternoon.

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BOND: Science used to justify racism

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grandfather was approaching his 40th birthday.

He said science today is being used to justify racism, Social Darwinism is in vogue, and conservative politicians are pushing to have civil rights issues revert back to the states and away from the federal government.

According to Bond, this precarious racial climate has once again made minority scapegoats for economic and social problems.

"According to conservatives' aggressive blacks and puny whites are responsible for America's demise," Bond said.

As a student at Morehouse University, Bond studied with Martin Luther King Jr. He later marched with King in the 1960s and was arrested in Atlanta for leading a protest against the whites-only lunch counter at city hall.

Following his talk, Bond said the effort to reopen the investigation into the assassination of King is misguided.

"They have the man who killed Martin Luther King in jail now," Bond said of James Earl Ray. "There may have been others in on it, but they have the man. The other people who are likely involved are his two brothers, so he could tell us that at any time."

In 1960, Bond co-founded the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights.

He served in Georgia's House of Representatives from 1966-75 and in the Georgia Senate from 1975-87. Bond served as president of the Atlanta NAACP from 1978-89.

He is currently a history professor at the University of Virginia and a scholar at the American University in Washington.

Bond said in the current racial climate in the United States, the focus of responsibility has shifted from the perpetrators to the victims of racism.

"Black people did it, did it to themselves, did it to the country," Bond said in describing current attitudes.

He said many white Americans still believe all African-Americans are pathological and unfit to live next door.

However, Bond did not skirt the issue of violence in the black community. He said the incidents of black men killing other black men is out of control.

"As angry white men blow up buildings, angry black men blow each other away," Bond said.

Bond also said there are far too many incidents of teen-age motherhood, single-parent families, low birth weight, and other social problems in the black community.

The civil rights movement opened the way for similar efforts for women, the elderly and gays, according to Bond.

He said race and gender discrimination and abuse of power, "were all weakened by the movement's drive and we are all better for it."

According to Bond, many people are confused where the next step should be in moving civil rights forward.

However, he said it was not just Martin Luther King who drove the Civil Rights Movement, but thousands of people who turned out to protest and organize.

"We ought to remember how those fragile victories were won," Bond said.

Following the talk, Bond said he is dismayed that the University of California at Berkeley abolished affirmative action.

He said the action closes the door on a top quality education to a whole generation of minority students.

The only way to reverse the trend in California of abolishing affirmative action is to reverse Proposition 209, Bond said.

However, he does not see that happening in the near future.

Bond said he was pleased to hear President Bill Clinton apologize for slavery during his Africa visit, but "it is not a panacea."

He said he does not understand the opposition by some Americans to apologies for slavery, since Germany has apologized and paid reparations to Israel for the Holocaust and Canada has apologized to Native Americans.

Bond said Clinton's visit to Africa opened eyes in America to vibrant, modern societies and not just famine-stricken countries ruled by dictators.

"The American public can see that democracy is the rule and not the exception in Africa," Bond said.