The president and I have agreed since the beginning of this discussion a year and a half ago that this should be a community decision. It should not be made by fiat by the administration. I still believe that, and so I speak today simply as an individual and member of the Senate, not on behalf of the administration.

I have great respect for the women and men who serve in our military. I have great respect for our students who have chosen to join ROTC and prepare for a career in the military. I oppose the amendments that have been phrased today by others. But I think they should be decided as a matter of principle, not tactically. Many people have many feelings on both sides of this issue that have nothing to do with the discriminatory policies of the military for me personally, however, the only issue is that those policies are discriminatory.

I can say with conviction that to invite ROTC back to Columbia has been presented by a number of people as a choice between two social goods. One social good is strengthening the military by our presence in it and giving opportunities to our students to participate openly and easily in military training, with money for scholarships. The other social good is defending our own principles on discrimination. The question before us is: Are those two causes equal? I believe that they are not. One is essentially a practical good, and the other is a moral good.

Would we, if faced with a similar situation, agree to form a formal association with an organization that said that African-Americans can join this organization only if they pass for white, that they can join this organization only if they claim to be Christians, or that this organization only if they claim to be Christians? That this organization is the plea, the demand, by gay and lesbian citizens for the same rights and the same level of human dignity as other citizens? And I believe that it is not. On the contrary, I believe that the great human rights movement of this century, our time, the civil rights movement, the movement for the rights of African-Americans for the same rights and the same level of human dignity as any other Americans, and all we have seen in recent months, that movement is currently under relentless assault. If we decide as a community that their demand for justice has less weight than other demands that we all support, what message does that send to our gay, lesbian and bisexual students and colleagues and friends? What would it say about what this institution stands for?

—Alan Brinkley, Provost