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Unpacking Lt. Dan Choi's Tricky Race & Class Talk on Democracy Now!

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So finally Amy Goodman and producers at **Democracy Now!** got it together to have a real debate about Don't Ask, Don't Tell, as opposed to doing what they did in 2009, which is to let Lt. Dan Choi, the poster boy of ending the DADT policy, to go on and on without any opposing voice (that, and Goodman has written pieces on Choi for Truthdig not once, but twice! and I would ask any progressive and radical people who listen to or watch her show as a left alternative to mainstream media to think critically about what this suggests about her political concerns and commitments, and to me, the ways in which the Left, in its attempts to be LGBT friendly have so little concern or even a notion that there are queer critiques of a lot of this mainstream bullshit. Sycamore wrote about this in a piece on [Bilerico](#) this past August.)

Yesterday, Goodman and co-host Juan Gonzalez hosted a debate between Choi and queer activist and writer Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore. What's interesting here with Choi's counter debate to Mattilda, we see the way bad and shallow race and class politics get thrown about by liberal and conservative queers (including people of color) to defend the push to expand the opportunities for LGBT people to serve openly in the military. To try and position Sycamore as part of some elite group of queers who have the luxury of questioning LGBT involvement in the military, *Choi starts his response to Sycamore by race and class baiting, where he suggests that the LGBT young people he meets around the country do not have the opportunity to be on television, get book deals, model or to know that they have any other job or career options other than serving in the military.*

This is the most dangerous thing about the DADT debate. While I agree that there are a lot of poor and working class queers, and queers of color, people in rural communities, etc., who don't know that they have other a lot of other options, or who see the military as one of a few viable options. But let's be clear, Choi also gets to be on TV and travel the country talking to queer youth from poor backgrounds, and he is not offering them other options. He is actually instead supporting this choice, which he says they see as their only career option. Furthermore, just because the US Armed Forces is by the default the largest jobs program for the country, does not mean we should accept that as an

ethically defensible truth, despite the many people who, given the current structure of our economy, might not have other stable employment choices (although the rate of homelessness among returning veterans ought to tell you that that job stability may last only so long as you're employed by the military.). People have tried to use this argument with me, given that I work for Queers for Economic Justice, and knowing my race politics, that the fact that Black women are disproportionately discharged through DADT should make me want to support lifting the ban on race, class and gender terms. This is a false racial, gender and economic justice argument that should be constantly called into question by queers on the left and our allies.

“War is the force that gives us meaning, war is the force that teaches us the lesson of humanity, and allows us to realize something about our society, and teaches us the lessons we probably should have learned before we went to war”

This is also really as much a part of the issue at hand, that many in the anti-war movement have really yet to articulate a response to. Despite the material reasons why many poor people (including people of color, queers and queer people of color) choose to join the military, the reality is *many* also join because they buy into notions of patriotism, or notions of war and violence as just or necessary, as long as one's country says it is so.



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