

first time a woman leader. Increasingly the PAC was seen by certain of the remaining members of the PTC as an extension of an "old boys" network striving for legal rights and not much more, while the PTC was seen by some PAC members as a group of "radical feminists" or "separatists," and in that they favored a social-issue orientation to politics, were seen as politically maladroit. Funding became a problem, since any funding activity in the gay community targets the same group: gays.

And the gay community no longer seemed to be behind the PTC. "You can't keep a group going without the backing of the community," says Kinnard. Seen positively, the PTC's job was done. More pessimistically, it was a victim of in-fighting and of a male prerogative to stream-line "effectiveness" and "purpose" to those areas where "effectiveness" and "purpose" are most tangibly recognized and accomplished — politics and fund-raising.

The consequences of these issues, Kinnard claims, are the fragmentation of the present. There is a sufficiently strong and well-organized presence representing the community at the upper reaches of power.

referendum as an example — none of it should have come on the community with such surprise or lack of organization. This kind of adversity is ongoing, and one's response should not be merely reactive. "We need to understand these movements, and how they feel." A healthy PTC-style group would, in Kinnard's estimation, have the obligation, through perhaps a newsletter, to keep its members informed and prepared. This newsletter could take in and distribute information from around the country, as well as be an information source for local news and for what exists in town.

There needs to be more than just politics. We need to educate ourselves about ourselves. Kinnard believes, for instance, that gays and lesbians should be made more aware of the benefit of counselling — there is too much drinking, drugs, unhappiness in the community without sufficient realization that methods exist to deal with these problems. Kinnard is involved with a Black lesbian and gay group, and would be interested in putting together an educational forum, in the manner of the Diversity Alliance, dealing with social concerns.

But there are problems. Organization

The state has always been, after all, politically progressive: It had caught Lowery's attention that Oregon had nearly passed a gay rights bill in the middle '70s. He packed and moved west to Portland in 1977.

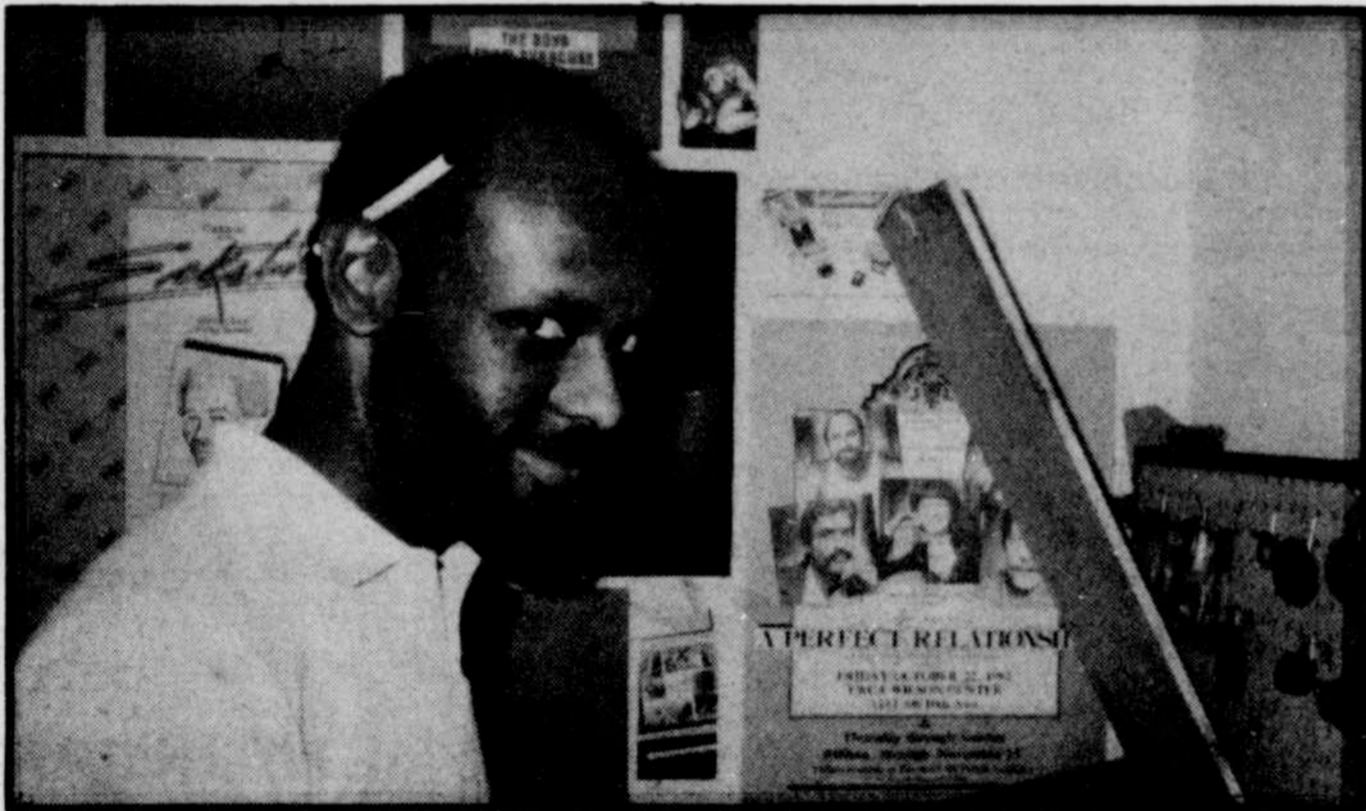
Socially, Lowery finds Portland to be much the place described by Edmund White in *States of Desire*: people here are a blend of tough-minded independence, countrified innocence, and libertarian nonchalance. "Anything goes." Even those who don't approve of you generally allow you to do as you want. A more political way of saying the same thing (the way Lowery would say it), is that "repressive forces don't dictate our lives and identities. We are in control of ourselves."

Being in control of ourselves as gays is the main thrust of Lowery's politics. This fits nicely enough with the independence and self-determination that Lowery characterizes as the Oregonian social spirit. But it also means, that as the "good old days" of de rigueur activism of the '60s fade further from the memory, Portland gay and lesbian political and social organization has tended to become more and more loose-woven.

In the '70s, the main focus of political and social organizations for gays was the Portland

more affluent and established, "involvement" can mean, at its simplest, once a year attending a big meal in glittering company. But Lowery reminds one that what the PAC does, it does well — it raises money for political causes. That a more community-oriented organization is not much in evidence is not Lowery's, nor the PAC's fault. Nor its intention to displace.

The reason that Lowery sees for the failure of a PTC-type organization at the present (that is, a gay/Lesbian "support group" that effectively provides day-to-day social and educational services to the community) is derived at least in part from historical problems within the Portland gay community. The eventual dispersal of the PTC stemmed, in Lowery's opinion, from a too-strident sense of self-criticism and self-purification. The tendency in the latter days of the old PTC was to enforce on the group a "purer and purer" self-definition. According to Lowery, the attempt was being made to make political or social "correctness" an issue within the group, thus causing schisms and in-group hard feelings that still exist today. There was too much ideology, claims Lowery, and too little practicality. To draw the circle small



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Lowery: Get involved. Take responsibility in no matter how small a way. Above all, do not let others decide the issues or battles for us.

But what Kinnard feels is missing, and where work needs to be done, is with other more social gay issues, and with groups and individuals whose needs differ from those addressed by politics. When Kinnard was in the PTC, he was involved with what was called the "Diversity Alliance," a group that in its membership represented the breadth of the Portland gay community — racial minorities, the aged, the hearing- and sight-impaired, even recalls Kinnard, straights. We have, as a group, many facets and many things to say about ourselves.

It is this self-education, and the need to cohesively express diversity that the Portland gay community lacks at present. For Kinnard, the problem is symbolized by the single-minded drive at the moment, for gay rights, a movement which is a distillation of what Kinnard sees as the spirit of the white male gay community: "Give me legal rights and then let me go back to the bar." But gays need more than just rights. Women's movements, for instance stress the need for equality, recognition of minorities, age-related problems — inside and outside the community — in short a "more total view." Men, says Kinnard, are "obsessed with rights," and think that any other issue weighs down the rights issue.

Even though Kinnard has "no anticipation of change" regarding the fragmentation of the community by its own diversity, he would like to see a return to a PTC-like organization. We need a "watch-dog organization," he says, to monitor problems. He cites the Drew Davis

takes money. But all the money in the community goes to the PAC. Organization takes energy. But fragmentation and apathy hold the day. Social outreach and educational activism for the gay community cannot exist without the backing and interest of the community itself.

Keeston Lowery

If politics had not already existed, Keeston Lowery is one of those people who would have had to create it. Growing up in Arkansas at the height of the Black civil rights movement in a family involved with political activism, Lowery has arrived unhesitatingly at his role as chairperson for the Right to Privacy PAC, and as the nominal spokesman for Portland's gay community.

For Lowery, as for others coming out of the '60s and early '70s, it was never a question of whether or not to have political commitment, but when and where. Where was Arkansas, and when was after being suddenly dismissed from his position in a clinic as a physical therapist. Lowery publicly pressed his employer for a reason for his being fired. "I just wanted him to say it: gay." The employer couldn't, or didn't, and Lowery was re-hired. Later Lowery helped lobby at the Arkansas State Legislature, and started a gay rights group in Little Rock.

"If it hadn't been gay politics, it would have been something else."

Oregon, though, had been on his mind.

Town Council. Lowery joined the PTC when he moved to Portland, and was subsequently involved with the PTC's political action committee when it was formed in 1977. When the PTC ceased to exist in the early '80s, amid still-present hard-feelings and resentment, Lowery was instrumental along with other ex-PTC members, in forming the Right to Privacy PAC.

The PAC, which Lowery chairs, continues the political side of the old PTC. Its functions are to raise money and to endorse political candidates.

The unabashed and single-issued political nature of the PAC has drawn criticism: its role in the community is simply to raise money and influence politicians. Lowery wishes that those who criticize Right to Privacy or his role in the gay community should look at what is being done by the PAC, not at what is not. Lowery is not, he states, responsible for what isn't there, but rather for what is.

What there is to his, and his fellow PAC member's credit, is the Lucille Hart dinner, a \$60 a plate extravaganza at the Benson which last year netted \$30,000 (more than any gay PAC in the country save MECLA in Los Angeles). The money is used to support candidates and prepare a voter's guide. Money, Lowery believes, is the most efficient way of political influence.

But there is the charge that the Lucille Hart dinner and the PAC in general have helped to create an atmosphere of political and social nonchalance. As Portland gays become

enough to include only those of the correct beliefs is possible but divisive. This tendency toward political coteries, Lowery sees as a "masturbating amongst ourselves." And as a result, he cites the present fragmentation into groups and forums, and a mistrust of leadership).

Lowery is nothing if not a positivist, and practical into the bargain. "Draw the circle large enough," he says; "and eventually everyone is included." He sees gay sports associations as congenial — and politically useful — outlets for the community. So is the Portland Gay Mens Chorus. People are ready and willing, but just not organized in a conventionally political way. There is Phoenix Rising, and a counselling service for teen-aged gays.

But get involved, he urges. Take responsibility in no matter how small a way. It may be as small as Harvey Milk's admonition to "tell everyone." It may be as ambitious as instituting, for instance, informational luncheons with local candidates. Above all, do not let others decide the issues or battles for us. The movement must not be reactive only, nor self-defining. "We are in control of ourselves." What needs to be done is to create, as well as to air, feelings about what we must do ourselves for ourselves. But don't criticize for what is not being done. We must build on what we have. "And it depends on what we do."