

YOUTH

Making it happen

Portland woman represents sexual minority youth at national event

by Martha Allen

Rachel Eborá wasn't even born 30 years ago, when thousands of concerned youths risked their lives to register African American voters in the South. But the mother of a college student who was killed by Ku Klux Klan members during Freedom Summer '64 remembers the impact that youthful activists had on the country. And through her memories, the mother created Freedom Summer '94, a project that took Eborá from Portland to Washington, D.C., and on to the south last month.

Eborá, 22, was selected to participate in Freedom Summer '94 through her involvement with Oregon Sexual Minority Youth Network. The group, which works with lesbian, gay and bisexual youth throughout the state, was one of 20 youth programs chosen to join in the nationwide project—and the only sexual minority program.

"OSMYN is the only queer youth organization in the project," Eborá said. "There were other queer youth there, but, because I was representing OSMYN, I felt like it was my responsibility to counter the homophobic reactions, both within the project and from the people we met along the way."

Freedom Summer '94 was created by New York resident Carolyn Goodman in memory of her son, Andrew Goodman. Andrew and two companions, James Chaney and Michael Schwerner, were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan in Philadelphia, Miss., while working for the Mississippi Summer Project. The project involved thousands of students in a voter registration drive to help African Americans realize their constitutional right to vote.

"My son and thousands of others saw past the racial barriers commonplace back then," Goodman said. "It's going to be up to young people once again to reject the prejudices that cripple our society."

This summer's commemorative project, devoted to Andrew's memory, took representatives from 20 youth organizations to the nation's capitol and on to Mississippi for five days of workshops, learning and information exchanges. The sessions were intended to meet each youth group's need for leadership skills, planning, fund-raising strategies,

conflict resolution, training and public relations tips.

"We went to a church, the last place where Andrew was seen alive," Eborá said. "We came in the middle of a service, and we had to stand up, say our name and who we were representing. It was the scariest thing, here we were in the middle of nowhere, Mississippi, and I had a fear there would be so much homophobia there. But I did it."

Later, at a reception after the service, Eborá found her bravery rewarded when she met some women from Camp Sister Spirit, the women's conference center under attack in Ovett, Miss., about 100 miles from the church.

"I was able to talk with them about the climate and the lack of support they are facing," Eborá said, adding that the women had dealt with both verbal and physical attacks from hostile residents. "That was really hard to hear," she said. "It's so discouraging."

Eborá left Portland on June 17 and returned June 26. Her trip included a brief stop in New York City, where she took in some of the cultural events



Rachel Eborá (center) with Jesse Jackson and other youth representatives

the hope that youth can change the country.

"As opposed to the negative media images, that Generation X thing, this gives the hope that we can get together and form our own agenda to change some of the fucked-up things in this world," Eborá said.

To that end, some of the youth representatives were given a chance to meet with President Clinton

Shalala, secretary of the federal Department of Health and Human Services about the needs and concerns of queer youth.

"I told her, 'There are a lot of things that are not being addressed as far as gay, lesbian and bisexual youth are concerned.' I told her, 'You need to look at these things more closely.' She said that was true, and asked what the Department of Health and Human Services could do. I said, 'You need to listen, and give us a voice in whatever is going on.' She told me about a conference, and invited OSMYN to participate. That was one of the many things that came out of that reception."

Eborá, who works as a union organizer, said her career training as well as her involvement with OSMYN had prepared her to get the most out of the project.

"I feel like I've been more effective in talking to people, and been able to have them deal with their homophobia better, because I am a woman and a person of color," said Eborá, who is

Filipina. "There were many people of color in the project, and because of that, my main goal was to get them to widen their analysis of oppression to include queer discrimination—oppression because of sexual orientation.

"I am able to speak to a more common philosophy, rooted in oppression based on race," Eborá said. "I tried to get them to understand that's not the only thing. There are a lot of oppressive forces out there, targeting other minorities, including queer youth."



Bus rides and congregating in southern churches helped recreate the atmosphere of Freedom Summer '64.

going on in conjunction with Gay Games IV before traveling to Washington, D.C., where she met with the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League.

"It was my vacation from my job," Eborá said. "I wanted to get the most out of it."

The youth involved in the project represent all different backgrounds, Eborá said, and their groups target very diverse young people [see accompanying list]. The best part of the project, Eborá said, was the reason they all were there—getting together to share ideas and resources, and to sustain

and other high-ranking political officials. Six youths were chosen to go to the conference, and Eborá was one of the six. Three got a chance to meet the president, but Eborá was not among them.

"We met with members of Congress at the Capitol," Eborá said. The youths also met members of Clinton's Cabinet, and Jesse Jackson.

"I actually got a chance to talk," she said. "There were so many people. But I feel like I will actually be able to keep in contact with them."

Eborá said she spoke to an assistant to Donna



PHOTOS BY RACHEL EBORÁ

Many groups represented in Freedom Summer '94

Freedom Summer '94 included youth representatives from the following groups:

Austin Grassroots Think Tank, Chicago—Encourages young people to use writing, music and performance to express community concerns.

Community Culture and Resource Center, Lexington, Miss.—Works to improve public education in Holmes County, the fifth poorest in the United States.

East Bay Asian Youth Center, Berkeley, Calif.—Investigates violence among Asians, working with former gang members.

Fundt Freedom School, Washington, D.C.—Offers an after-school program to get kids interested in learning.

Intelligent Black Youth Coalition, Jackson, Tenn.—Works with youths in rural counties to deal with drugs, education and other issues.

Native Action, Lame Deer, Mont.—Has young people working with adults to get a high school on their reservation.

Nubian Roots, Roxbury, Mass.—Involves teens in community politics.

Operation Break and Build, Kansas City, Mo.—Former and current gang members work to address police/youth relations, violence, and other issues.

Oregon Sexual Minority Youth Network,

Portland, Ore.—Gives support to gay, lesbian and bisexual youth.

Save Our Cumberland Mountains, Lake City, Tenn.—Youth councils address racial tensions among students.

Sensational Brothers and Sisters, Hahnville, La.—Educates the community on environmental safety.

Serious Teens Acting Responsibly, Hardyville, S.C.—Organizes workshops to teach skills to teen-agers.

The Unity Club, Cleveland, Ohio—Works with Parent Teacher Associations, religious groups and housing authorities to establish communication among students.

Ujima, Decatur, Ga.—Works on the problem

of youth violence.

Up and Coming, Compton, Calif.—Involves youths from 13 Los Angeles schools in community service.

Urban X, New York City—Works to provide a voice for youth in developing city policy on issues relating to youth.

Youth Peacemakers, Minneapolis—Strengthens the cultural identity of its members, mainly Native Americans.

Youth Unity, Philadelphia—Teaches youth how to get along peacefully with police and how to reduce racial tensions.

Freedom Summer information line: 1-800-Free 415. OSMYN information: 228-5976