

Jubi D. Headley Jr. is the new executive director of the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum, the country's largest organization specifically geared toward sexual minority African Americans. He assumed the post March 1.

The 28-year-old is a large man whose voice and presence is a blend of infectious exuberance and relaxed dignity. It's a complex balance, smooth and natural, not calculated. He is sometimes a bit awed by the challenges before him, but eager to embrace them.

Headley was conceived in Barbados, but his family, with whom he is very close, emigrated to Boston prior to his birth.

Puberty hit and he "started dreaming about men, fantasizing about them." Headley became sexually active in his teens but didn't come out until he was 19.

He excelled at Boston Latin and later at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

During his sophomore year, Headley's oldest sister secretly married, a fact his mother bemoaned one evening during dinner. Perhaps it was sibling rivalry that prompted him to say: "You never have to worry about me, Mom. I'm never getting married, so I'll never put you through this kind of stress." A flurry of questions hit him from all sides before he disclosed his sexual orientation.

That was in 1989. Nearly a decade later, Headley says his mother still isn't completely comfortable with his sexuality. However, when he called her to say he had been offered the Leadership Forum position, she replied, "If that is what you want to do, that is what you have to do, because you have to live your own life."

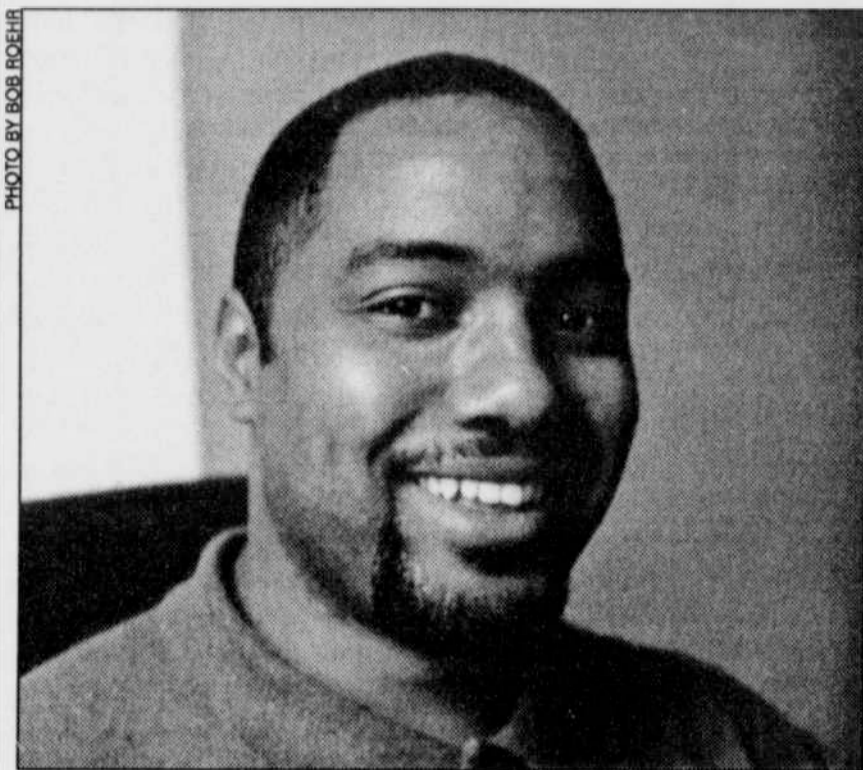
He says, "I love my mother and I need her in my life. For her to be trying is enough for me. I think that is a level of growth."

Headley adds that he loved his father, though the two often clashed.

"I think we were too much alike. Plus, he was not the most respectful person to my mother during the course of their marriage," says

OUT OF DENIAL

As incoming head of the Black Leadership Forum, Jubi D. Headley Jr. wants to set a new direction by Bob Roehr



Jubi D. Headley Jr.

Headley. "I saw him as the obstacle to the family's happiness."

The elder Headley developed cancer and died when his son was just 18. The duo had begun to reconcile during those last months, and his Dad's death shook Jubi deeply.

But at the same time it opened a door. "Had he not died, I may not have come out to my family, because it is very clear he would not have dealt with it the same way my mother did. I was probably afraid of coming out to him," he says.

As for coming out, Headley says it was a process for him, as well. He says the Leadership Forum's 1994 conference was a personal watershed.

Headley says the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum's 1994 conference marked the first time he realized "we could be openly gay and political and successful."

"In retrospect I realize there are stages of coming out," Headley explains. "And while I had told everybody that I was gay, I don't think that I had owned that fact, or recognized it as a political or spiritual identity. The conference really helped me to recognize that."

While there, Headley met Ken Reeves, who was at the time mayor of Cambridge, Mass.

Headley says the occasion marked the first time he realized "we could be openly gay and political and successful."

He adds, "I met Bishop Carl Bean and it opened my eyes to the idea that we could have a spiritual identity, and we were entitled to one. And we didn't have to wait for someone to say it was OK, we could make our own."

Like so many of his generation, Headley has been shaped by the shadow of AIDS and a limited sense of community.

So meeting Ruth Waters, the Leadership Forum's co-founder, "an openly lesbian African American woman who could potentially have been my grandmother, was an amazing experience. It was the first time that I realized our community had longevity and a history."

Headley adds that that gathering four years ago was the most supportive, affirming space he had ever been in.

"That is when I became really invested in working with the forum," he says.

After college, Headley returned to Boston and landed a job as a trainer in substance abuse and HIV. Meeting Reeves at the conference led Headley to work on a local AIDS conference that summer, and eventually to a job as the mayor's executive assistant.

A year and a half later, when the mayor's term ended, Headley moved to Washington, D.C., to work with the U.S. Conference of Mayors. The Leadership Forum opened its D.C. office about the same time, and Headley volunteered for a number of projects.

As the new head of the group, Headley vows to help "improve communication with the membership and engage them more in the work that the forum does."

Headley also believes there is far too much denial among black community leadership with respect to the AIDS pandemic.

He says for the past 18 years, the National Urban League has published a report entitled "The State of Black America" and "has yet to recognize this epidemic" in its evaluation.

Headley wants to see that change. Additionally, he pledges to "pummel the sensibilities of the African American community until they recognize, accept and hopefully eventually celebrate the diversity, not only the racial diversity, but the gender diversity, the sexual diversity that is in our community."

THROWING THE BOOK AT THE HELLFIRE AND BRIMSTONE SET

Frustrated by the barrage of out-of-context Bible quotes used by the religious right wing to condemn homosexuality, publisher Bruce Joffe decided to create a forum for queer theological dialogue, the Gannett News Service reports.

Joffe says he believes there is a market for such discourse, and the early response shows he may be right: With only two issues and a Web site, the journal's subscription list is about to top 1,000.

The first issue of the thrice-yearly *Gay Theological Journal* was published in September 1997, followed in February by a second, which carries stories on topics like gayness in Judaism, sexual justice, reclaiming the erotic, and welcoming queer people into communities of faith.

Contributors have included lay people and clergy from Presbyterian, Episcopal, Unitarian, Methodist, Baptist, United Church of Christ, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, Mennonite and Jewish denominations.

For more information about the *Gay Theological Journal*, call (703) 330-5600 or visit its Web site (www.pubpartners.com/gaytheojnl.html).

SLDN SAYS MILITARY LEADERS ARE STILL ASKING

Military commanders routinely violate the Pentagon's "don't ask, don't tell" policy by aggressively investigating the private lives of personnel suspected of being gay—that according to a report released Feb. 19 by the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network.

SLDN says the number of violations of the policy reported to the organization rose from 443 in 1996 to 563 in 1997.

Under the policy, commanders are allowed to begin an investigation if they receive "credible information" of homosexual conduct, but the 80-page report says investigations are often

motivated by nothing more than belief or suspicion. The report goes on to describe "heavy-handed and increasingly intrusive investigative tactics against suspected gays."

The violations continue to occur, despite promises to the contrary, because military commanders don't fully understand the language and intent of the policy, says SLDN co-director Michele Benecke.

The report does cite some instances in which the military punished members who perpetrated anti-gay crimes or harassment, however, and Benecke identified one favorable development in the past year: For the first time, not a single service member was convicted and sent to prison for consensual gay sex.

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