

Getting the House in Order

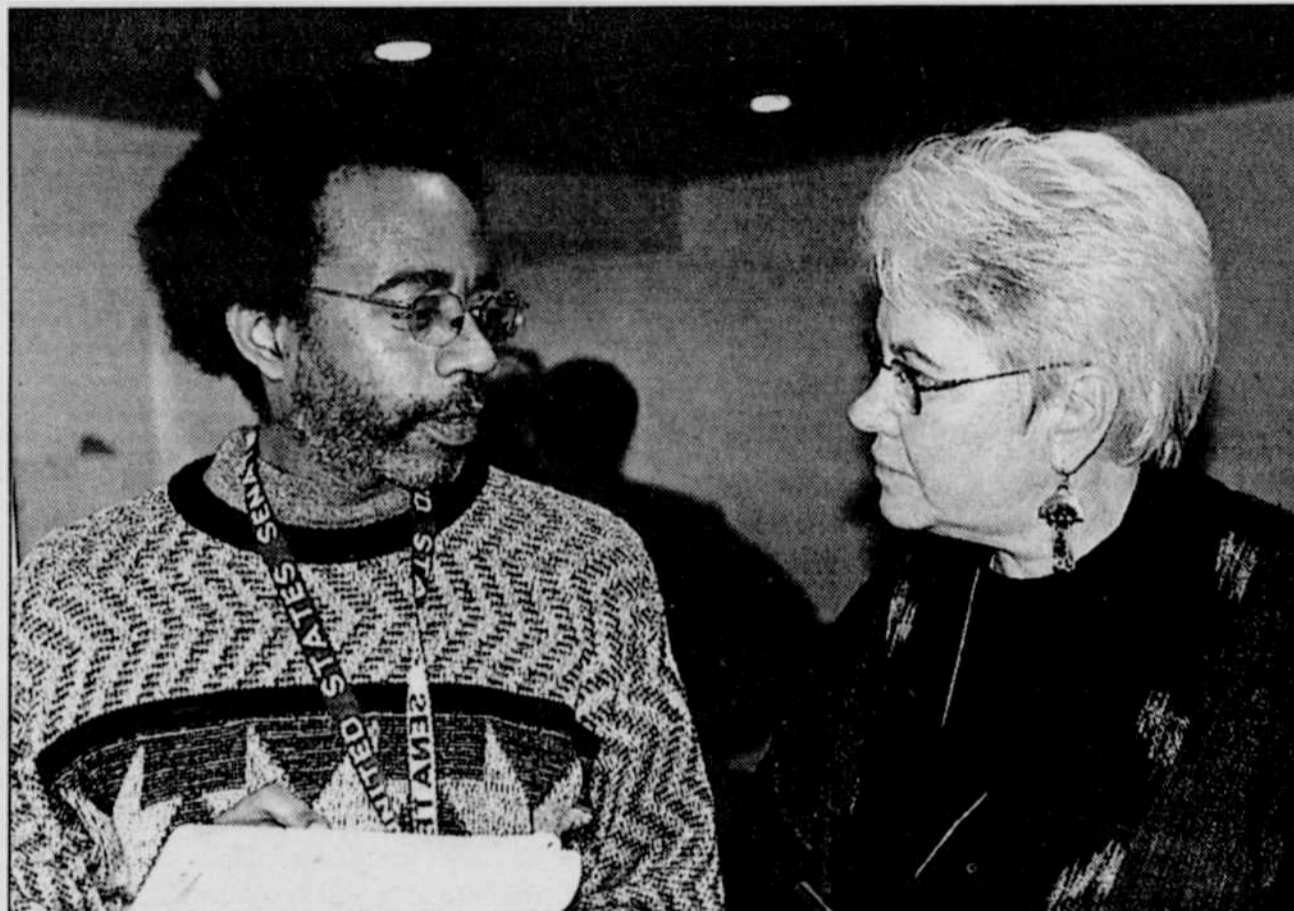
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with a vision of tomorrow that goes beyond tolerance to a genuine celebration of humanity's diversity have innumerable fronts to fight on. Homophobia is one of them. But there are many, many others."

Because there are so many fronts to fight on, it is hard to know where to begin. But the conference's speakers have a few ideas about getting out of our safe spaces and spurred to action.

"White LGBT folks can proactively seek out and join social and economic justice groups and efforts happening where they are," Carter says. "I think it's important for us to move from our 'safe spaces' in our LGBT groups and movements and venture out to where other folks are doing work for equality and justice. We should get away from the assumption that if it's a people of color organization and/or campaign that white folks aren't welcome. As an out black lesbian, I've been active in bridge building for years between people of color and white communities. We need white bridge builders between the white community and people of color community," she says.

Carter also suggests the sexual minorities community needs a larger pool of trained, paid organizers to place around the country. She says we should take a comprehensive look at all local, state and federal legislation that



Cecil Prescod consults with a volunteer during a Creating Change 2002 Host Committee meeting earlier this year

either is helping or stopping social and economic justice for U.S. people of color; determine and advertise lawmakers' positions; and get out the vote.

"The work is about more than our queerness," Vazquez says. "We must finally put an end to identity politics as the central strategy of our political work. Yes, we need places of safety and places to heal. But what are we healing ourselves for? So we can leave the world in the same mess we found it?"

"It is reductive," she continues. "We reduce our struggle to that which can be understood only within identity construction rather than placing our identities within the context of the larger struggles for social and economic justice. We must put an end to all the posturing around being 'inclusive,' which really means we put a black or brown or trans face on the program but never really change the agenda.

"We must treat each other with respect for our social, racial, ethnic, physical and political differences. We must continue to acknowledge the many painful ways we have internalized sexist, racist and homophobic messages in order to move beyond the limitations of how we have been conditioned," Vazquez continues. "It does no good to say we're not racist or we're not up to our eyeballs in class inequities. We are so."

Sweeney adds: "I ask that LGBT people

think through how we are going to get the change we need if we don't think large enough to engage allies and attack the underlying roots of hatred and bigotry. For instance, we all believe in the concept of safe schools and stopping harassment of LGBT kids. But stopping harassment requires training, and training requires money. War, deficit, priorities? The safe schools movement has to join forces with the larger educational equity movement that is trying to get funds to those school districts that most need them—almost all of which are in low-income communities of color."

Jean says it is no surprise that racism operates on an individual and institutional level in our movement because our community is simply a microcosm of a larger, racist society. She believes that this racism has hindered our effectiveness internally and externally and that the right wing is taking advantage of it.

"It's morally and ethically important" to face racism, she says. "It's tactically and strategically important. This issue has become even more acute as the religious political extremists who are driving the anti-GlBT movement in this country have begun targeting communities of color into their anti-gay crusade. If our community doesn't have its own house in order, it is all the more difficult for us to build the coalitions with predominantly heterosexual organizations of people of color—coalitions that will be necessary for our success.

"We deeply and sincerely hope that this year's conference will help to promote real, serious, compassionate, intellectually honest, important conversations about race, racism and building an anti-racist GLBT movement. We hope that Creating Change will propel not only the conversations but that it will give birth to specific actions and strategies that will contribute to our success in building an anti-racist movement. The conference has served as such a catalyst for important issues in the past, and it can do so this year as well." □

The 15th annual CREATING CHANGE conference will be held from Nov. 6 to 10 at the DoubleTree Jantzen Beach, 909 N. Hayden Island Drive. The registration rate is \$250, but people who commit to four hours of volunteering can attend that day's sessions for free. Duties include handing out workshop evaluations, staffing registration tables, greeting out-of-town guests and patrolling the area to make sure rooms are secure. All volunteers must attend an orientation starting every hour between noon and 6 p.m. Nov. 3 at the hotel. For more information call 503-282-1542 or e-mail creatingchange02@yahoo.com. For a complete schedule of events visit www.creatingchange.org.

KIM STEPHENSON is a Portland free-lance writer.



Suzanne Pharr, Highlander Research and Education Center executive director, and Paul Akio Kawata, National Minority AIDS Council executive director, also will speak during the conference



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