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—Mandy Carter

the track, it was about that equality. It is the philosophical underpinning of why we do what we do, what we believe in, and so when I graduated in '66, I got involved with the anti-Vietnam War movement. And it went from there to feminism, nuclear disarmament, every movement that came along that had an underpinning of equality and justice, and as an out black lesbian progressive, I wanted to work not only on gay stuff. As a black woman I have race issues, as a woman I have women's issues.

The first conversations about this whole marriage thing happened at a time when no one thought it was going to be a major issue for our movement.

Of course in 1992 what was an anti-gay ballot initiative has turned into all these anti-same-sex marriage initiatives, but it's all the same thing. The radical right rising up with all this stuff.

What I think this time—I'll just be blunt. In 2004, to my knowledge, there was not one person of color, gay or lesbian or straight, that ran the fight against these statewide ballot measures. That wasn't good because it looked like the only people who cared about same-sex marriage were white gays, and it just perpetuated an image. There are people of color all across this country who believe that marriage equality is important, and they are going to be on the front lines of this.

Here's another reality check. There are a lot of people in the communities of color who don't think this is a priority issue. There also people in the gay community who think that this marriage equality issue is taking away from more pressing issues—AIDS, whatever.

That is why the [National] Black Justice Coalition is fighting to make sure that this issue is front and center of the black queer agenda. I don't want to sound like I'm stepping out of turn or being disrespectful, but a lot of it comes from the black gay male community. They think this is somehow taking away from the importance of the AIDS issue, and it's not. It shouldn't take away from it; if anything, it should show how it has some relevance or some connection. On the other hand, I know a lot of black lesbians who have families. I think more black lesbians have children than white lesbians do.

People don't want to talk about the gay thing, they don't want to talk about in relation to AIDS, and they don't want to talk about it in relation to marriage equality. Once again, it's that homophobic reality that is mixed in there and just adds that uniqueness of the whole black perspective.

When you talk about the white right, they are anti-gay, but they are also anti-people of color. If

people from our community want to get in bed with white right, they have to understand that these people are anti-affirmative action, pro-school vouchers, they are against school lunch programs. These are kids who wouldn't have food otherwise; these are poor kids of color who are not only black.

We have a big job to do—doing multiracial marriage equality work all across the country—with organizations like Basic Rights Oregon but also with our black community.


In a way, we have this wonderful unexpected consequence of the white right trying to mess with our people, forcing us to have this very honest and very open conversation about homophobia in the black community.

You might have heard of the recent Black Church Summit. That was a direct response to us getting beat up on for the last 10 or 15 years.

SD: What do you perceive was the outcome of that conference?

MC: Unbelievable. Historically, it was the first time in an organized way that you had the buy-in of some of your really respectable, viable black ministers, especially in Atlanta, who said we need to have this conversation. Not only was it Rev. Al Sharpton, but probably more importantly, it was the church where it took place in Atlanta, the First Iconium Baptist Church. The man who opened up his doors, the Rev. Tim McDonald—you can't get any better than him to be the church. It's groundbreaking...

You know, Coretta Scott King has been a heroine in terms of being consistent for the last number of years saying to the white press: "You need to understand that if you discriminate on color, you have got to cover it. If you discriminate based on orientation, you have to cover it." But we didn't hear any major stories about Coretta Scott King supporting pro-gay positions. They barely ever talked about it.

That should have been front-page news. Because they kept on burying it and trying to not talk about it, while they were asleep at the wheel, the people who needed to hear it heard it from Coretta, and with her moral authority.... We wouldn't have been able to have that black church summit with Al Sharpton if it hadn't been for Coretta Scott King having laid down that moral authority layer first. 

A full transcript of this interview—including Carter's thoughts on homophobia in the black community and the role of black churches in fighting for marriage equality—is available at www.justout.com.

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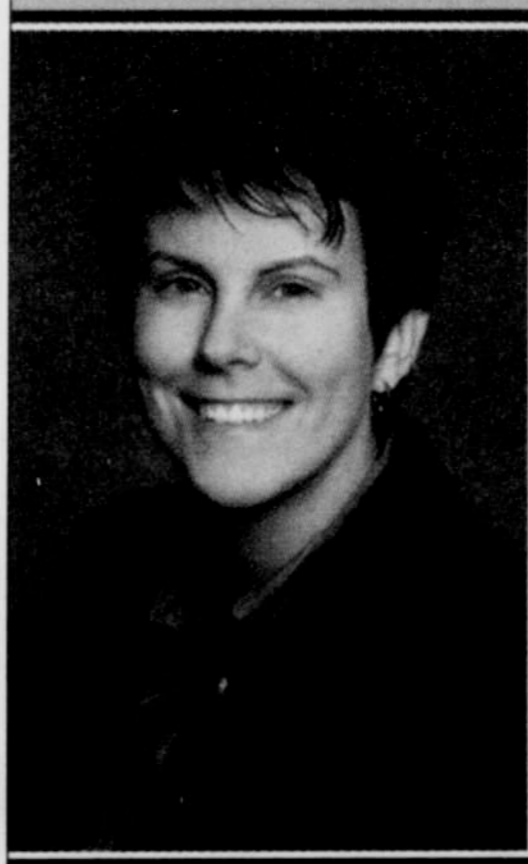
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