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The 2008 Benefit for the
Detroit Lesbian & Gay Welcome Center

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From Curtis Lipscomb, Kick Executive Director

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The Agency for Lesbian, Gay, Bi & Transgender African-Americans
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Activism vs. Activist-Minded: The Life of African-American, Lesbian, Gay, Bi, and Transgender People Greeting the 21st Century

by Lawrence T. Potter, Jr., PhD

Power is granted to the powerful on the basis of privilege. It benefits the powerful to extend privilege based upon its own interests. By dividing a group to whom it must concede rights, power limits the damage done to its own power base. Power will concede rights to women, but not lesbian women; or to blacks, but not black homosexuals; to gays, but not to gay transgendereds, and so on. Power divides based on its own interests, and these divisions are always suspect.

The life of African American lesbian, gay, bi, and transgender people is a life full of controversy, but also courageousness. We have been looked down upon, not only by racist individuals and groups as a result of our ethnicity; but have also been ostracized by the shallowness and ignorance within our ethnic group. More importantly, we have created divisions within our sexualized community by perpetuating the master's language, cynicism, ignorance, and violence. As we grow to understand power-relations and power distribution, we must learn to acknowledge differences without hurting one another; exercise power with diplomacy; create power within community; and do away with power structures when necessary. Unlike the hetero-normative population (Black and White alike), there must be an articulated agenda within us and our community that moves us to become activists and "masters" of our own fate. Thus, I propose four areas of concentration: spirituality, politics, health, and social reformation.

Spirituality is our foundation for survival. Many times, members of the African-American L-G-B-T community feel displaced when the crossroads of sexuality and spirituality meet. We must ground ourselves in truth about



Lawrence T. Potter, Jr., PhD, is Executive Director of Institutional Diversity at the University of St. Thomas.

Other Essays

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 by Anthony Howard

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 by Kimya Afi Ayodele, BSSW, LMSW, ACSW

Nobody but us: Saving our own lives from black homophobia
 by Todd Shaw, PhD

If Life Springs from Birth, Healing is the Single Mother of Progress
 by Terry Howcott

"spirituality" and knowledge of a "higher being," and learn to reject the age-old teachings of homosexuality as "sin."

Next, political mobilization is crucial to our community. We have withstood apathy for too long and we lose out everyday we do nothing about it. When HIV/AIDS was introduced June 5, 1981 it was reported to be "a white gay male disease." Because we had no desire (first as a Black community and second as a gay community) to become involved, time has shown how disproportionately our community loses lives daily.

By creating a political consciousness and activism, we endow our community to continue the fight for positive health. HIV/AIDS is not the only health question facing us, but is perhaps the most significant! We must advocate mental wellness for the sanctity of our community. If there is no sanity for the larger African-American L-G-B-T population, we are placed in a precarious duality – a weakening physical and psychological state. Preserving mental wellness is just as important as preserving our bodies from HIV/AIDS.

Finally, the African-American L-G-B-T community must develop a plan of social reformation. How we organize socially will determine the sustained future presence of our voices being heard. We must maintain an ever-present position in the public as well as private domains. It is through social reformation that our future to build alliances will provide the vision for our imagined and realized light at the end of the tunnel. We must become activists vs. activist-minded in the 21st century. The life of African-American lesbian, gay, bi, and transgender people will depend on all four elements. ■