

# Creating Change conference brings together racial, sexual justice groups

By David Elliot  
Special to Q-Notes

ATLANTA—The Thirteenth Annual Creating Change Conference, sponsored by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Foundation, was held November 9-12 with more than 500 participants engaging in a procession of respect to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change.

The Creating Change conference began two days after the November 7 election, with vote totals in the presidential race changing almost hourly. The election—and the unknown outcome—was a point of discussion throughout the conference. At an opening welcome, Coretta Scott King discussed the November 7 elections and the importance of coalition work. "In a way, we have just had an object lesson in the power of coalition unity," Mrs. King said. "I think we have just seen the future of American democracy flash before our eyes last Tuesday. The coalition that gave Al Gore a popular vote victory can surely be as powerful as the New Deal coalition that transformed America in an earlier era."

Quoting her late husband Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mrs. King said, "We are all tied together in a single garment of destiny...An inescapable network of mutuality...I can never be what I ought to be until you are allowed to be what you ought to be."

"Therefore," Mrs. King said, "I appeal to

everyone who believes in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream to make room at the table of brotherhood and sisterhood for lesbian and gay people."

"In Atlanta we have witnessed the convergence between the civil rights movement and the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender movement for justice," said NGLTF Executive Director Elizabeth Toledo. "Never again will we work in isolation. Never again will we act as though the GLBT struggle exists in a vacuum, cut off from and unconnected to the larger work against oppression. As we look ahead to an uncertain political climate, we know that the only way to achieve success is by building strong coalitions with partners who are also working to build a lasting social justice movement."

This year's Conference included more than 200 workshops, plenary sessions, special caucuses and other events. Two of the themes emphasized this year were organizing in the South and examining the intersection of different oppressions, including racism, sexism, ageism and bigotry against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

On Sunday, Dr. Manning Marable, one of the founders of the Black Radical Congress, professor of history and political science and the founding director of the Institute for Research in African-American studies at Colum-

bia University, delivered the keynote address at the closing plenary. Marable predicted that the ability of progressives to strengthen democracy in the United States will depend largely on whether progressives are successful in forging bonds between diverse activist communities. He also warned against pitting minority people against each other. "Our goal in the twenty-first century must be the construction of a human rights culture—a civil society that affirms the dignity, the creativity and the productivity of every single person in the United States," Dr. Marable said.

On Saturday, November 11, more than 300 activists marched to Centennial Park to demand a fair outcome in Florida. The demonstration was captured on CNN as well as a number of local TV stations. Protesters carried signs reading, "Fair is Fair: Florida Run-Off;" "Don't Trash 19,000 Votes;" and "Every Vote Counts."

Other highlights of this year's Creating Change Conference included:

- An address from Representative-elect Karla Drenner, who will soon be sworn in as Georgia's first openly lesbian state representative. In her speech, Drenner discussed why Atlanta was a perfect venue for Creating Change. "I am sure that many of you were surprised that the NGLTF chose to have its annual conference in Atlanta," Drenner said. "Because when you

think of Georgia, you really don't think of a lot of change, do you? Yes, it's true that Georgia has given us Newt Gingrich and Bob Barr, not to mention *Bowers v. Hardwick*. However, change is happening in the South. Over the past several years, Georgians have elected seven openly gay public officials, and in July, elected their first openly gay state representative."

- A march demanding that Georgia remove the Confederate battle flag emblem from its state flag. Demonstrators led by Atlanta activists marched from the Creating Change host hotel to Woodruff Park for a brief demonstration that was covered by the local ABC and NBC TV affiliates.

Next year's Conference has been booked for Milwaukee, Wisconsin. More information on the event is forthcoming. ▼



Correta Scott King

## Roanoke urges national financial relief to assist shooting survivors

by Eddie Ratliff  
Special to Q-Notes

The small Roanoke gay community has launched a nationwide "Night Of Remembrance" for Friday, December 22, exactly three months to the date that a determined gunman walked quietly into the Backstreet Cafe, a local gay bar, and opened fire with a 9-millimeter weapon. One patron was killed almost instantly and six others were seriously wounded.

While many people are aware of this tragedy, they are not aware of the continued suffering and plight of the survivors. Roanoke activists have launched a website, [www.Roanoke7.com](http://www.Roanoke7.com), to provide support to the survivors of the shooting, and to keep the public informed.

The website reports that four of the survivors recently had additional surgeries and are still recuperating from the wounds. Several have not worked since the night of September 22 and will not return to work until after the first of the year. Some were without adequate insurance or are strapped to make medical co-payments. One woman was shot in the left temple, the bullet went through the roof of her mouth blowing out her dental work, exited her neck, entered her shoulder and lodged in her lung. She is embarrassed to be in public without teeth.

The financial hardship will continue long after the wounds begin to heal. For that reason, [Roanoke7.com](http://Roanoke7.com) recently sent a mailing to gay bars throughout the country asking them to join Roanoke's Backstreet Café in supporting the survivors by hosting a benefit event that night and challenging their patrons to try to match the \$500.00 Roanoke fundraising goal. They also asked the clubs to pause at exactly 11:51 pm (the time of the shooting) to observe a moment of silence for the victims. ▼



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