



QNotes

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Black LGBTs organize for 'Power'

Charlotte chapter of National Black Justice Coalition established

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

exQlusive

CHARLOTTE — Community activists Dianna Ward and Quan Rutledge feel that many issues aren't being properly addressed within the Carolinas' LGBT community. Matters like discrimination, education and quality of life for LGBT African-Americans need more attention, they say.

Because of the lack of action, Ward and Rutledge have been working since August to establish the new Charlotte Steering Committee of the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC).

Nine additional leaders from the Queen City's LGBT community have joined them in forming the committee. They are Jahaan Davis, LaToya Hankins, Kistyn Mathews, Brodderick Roary, Monica Simpson, LaWana Slack, Ken Tinnen, Karen Worrell and John Wright III.

The committee is working on the local level for the national organization's "The Power of Us" campaign. The effort is a community mobilization initiative designed to increase visibility, financial support and activism.

Organizers say "The Power of Us" contains a positive and uplifting message to embrace,

celebrate and promote the talent, capabilities and contributions of LGBT people of color. They want to generate pride and empowerment and motivate black LGBT people and allies to take action and join NBJC.

Under the group's auspices, African-Americans in the Carolinas who identify as same-gender-loving or LGBT, or are straight allies of these communities, can band together to make a difference on issues that Steering Committee members feel are ignored or misunderstood by mainstream queer organizations.

"The Human Rights Campaign does not address black LGBT issues enough, or in a way that could really make an impact," Ward told Q-Notes.

She explained that there are differences in basic priorities that must be considered.

For example, while HRC and similar national LGBT organizations busy themselves fighting for marriage or employment discrimination, LGBT people of color are still battling for basic issues like educational opportunity, healthcare and the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Steering Committee members point out that they don't dislike HRC or other major, mainstream LGBT groups. "They are all doing great work," Ward said, "but a lot of their agendas don't always affect us in the here and now."

A key issue that national groups could better address, organizers feel, is the racism that is still present within the larger gay community.

"I think the white straight community at least owns up to having some bias," Ward said. "On the other hand, the white gay community thinks that since the LGBT community is so 'diverse,' they really don't have any problems with bias or prejudice based on race."

Rutledge added that the ignorance surrounding issues of race and diversity translates into what feels like avoidance "because the white gay community — for the most part, although not all — does not talk about the issues important to us."

But things seem to be improving. Ward was happy to see HRC's strong support for the Jena 6, although their speaking out came as a surprise.

"The fact they did anything at all was a shock," she said. "I definitely thought it was a step in the right direction."

HRC has begun circulating a survey for people of color and ethnic minorities. The survey will help the organization identify the

issues most important to particular minority communities.

In addition, Donna Payne, HRC Associate Director of Diversity, joined Rev. Al Sharpton, Martin Luther King III and other civil rights and religious leaders at a Nov. 16 march on the U.S. Justice Department in Washington, D.C. The event was called by Rev. Sharpton's National Action Network and other black leaders to protest the lethargic response of the Department of Justice in investigating hate crimes.

"I think HRC is trying to begin to address the fact that they haven't represented the entire LGBT community, and that is a good thing,"



NBJC Executive Director Alexander Robinson speaks to a crowd of supporters at a Maryland lobby day.

Rutledge said.

Ward echoed the sentiment and stressed that progress will be built on teamwork and coalition building.

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John Edwards

Q-Notes examines the candidates — Part three of a four-part series

by David Stout . Q-Notes staff

Over several issues we're spotlighting the Democratic presidential candidates in preparation for primary season. (Our installments on Sen. Hillary Clinton and Sen.

Barack Obama can be read online at www.q-notes.com.) The first Democratic primary occurs in Iowa on Jan. 3. South Carolina holds the earliest in the South on Jan. 26. The North Carolina Democratic primary takes place May 6.

We have made an editorial decision to limit our coverage to the Democrats because,

vis-à-vis LGBT issues, the leading Republican candidates range from woefully lacking to openly hostile, or they're Rudy Giuliani, an Iraq war hawk. Either way, the GOP slate is a disappointment and not worthy of consideration in our opinion.

John Reid Edwards

John Reid Edwards has fantastic hair. If you don't believe it, ask the Republicans. They love to talk about the "Breck Girl" with the silken locks and the \$400 haircut. It helps them paint the populist candidate as vain, weak, sissified. In fact, Edwards' hair is a trifecta of right-wing talking points — sexism, homophobia and genderphobia — in a single diversion.

Of course, with the party collapsing under the weight of an utterly failed war, the crumbling economy and one scandal after another,



what can the GOP do but smear the que...um, the candidate with the fabulous hair.

Courting success

The central theme of Edwards' campaign is the idea of two Americas: one for the rich and powerful and another for everyone else. Today, he enjoys the opportunities and benefits that come with being wealthy in this country, but he never fails to point out that he grew up in the other America — where his heart remains, he says.

His stump speeches challenge voters to reclaim the nation from sell-out politicians, corporations and lobbyists. In this way, he asserts, the Land of Opportunity might be as real for the next generation as it was for his.

Edwards was born in 1953 in Seneca, S.C., and grew up poor in Robbins, N.C. He often recounts the story that his father, a millworker, had to borrow money to get him out of the hospital as a newborn.

He was a high school football star and the first person in his family to attend college. The joy was short-lived. His parents could not afford Clemson's tuition and a hoped-for football scholarship evaporated when he didn't make the varsity squad. After just one semester, he was back home.

Edwards eventually enrolled at North Carolina State University. He graduated with honors in 1974, then earned a law degree with honors from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1977.

That summer, he married his UNC sweetheart, Elizabeth Anania. Their son Wade was born two years later, followed by Cate in 1982, Emma Claire in 1998 and Jack in 2000. Sadly, Wade died in a single-car accident in 1996.

In 1981, Edwards joined the law firm Tharrington, Smith & Hargrove. He gained

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