

Moving Forward: Creating Change 2006

OAKLAND, CA — More than 2,500 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights advocates convened in Oakland November 10-13 for the annual Creating Change Conference. Creating Change is the largest annual meeting of the national LGBT community. The conference reflects the breadth and scope of diversity of the LGBT community and its supporters.

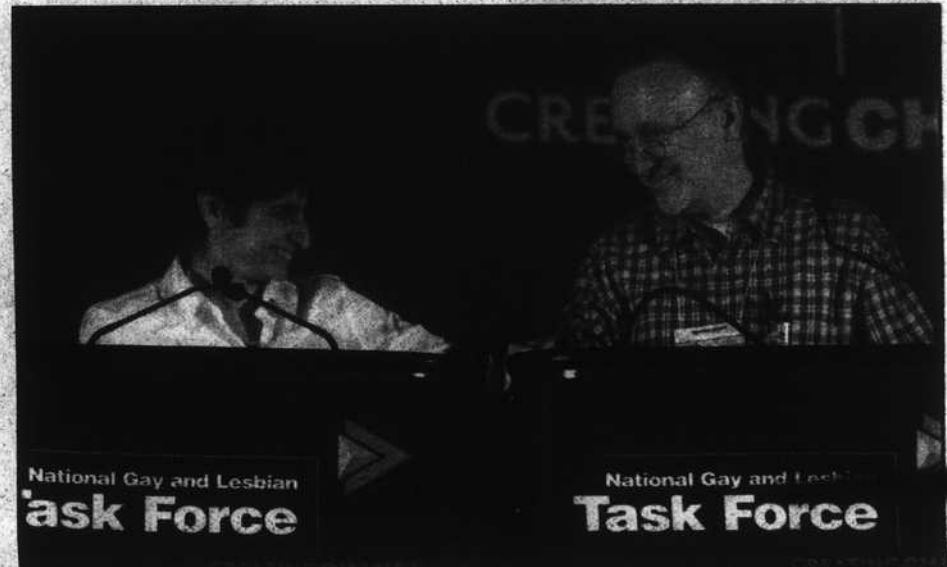
On Saturday, a full house of LGBT rights activists had the rare experience of 'eavesdropping' on a dialogue between Urvashi Vaid and John D'Emilio, two of the LGBT rights movement's preeminent thinkers. If there's anybody who knows about creating change, it's this duo, who co-presented what they described as an ongoing conversation in their 18-year friendship. The two took on big-picture issues related to the movement: its successes and failures, as well as how best to move forward.

D'Emilio, who teaches at the University of Illinois of Chicago, is a former Task Force board co-chair and the founding director of the Task Force Policy Institute, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. He has writ-

ten or edited more than half a dozen books, including *Sexual Politics*, *Sexual Communities*, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*; and *Lost Prophet*, an award-winning biography of African-American civil rights leader Bayard Rustin. From 1986 to 2001, Vaid worked for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, first as media director and then as executive director, and finally as director of the Policy Institute. She has written dozens of articles and commentaries, as well as the book, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay & Lesbian Liberation*. In September, Vaid became executive director of the Arcus Foundation.

In their keynote, D'Emilio and Vaid praised the work of national organizations to build political power, win legal rulings, and improve the health and well-being of the LGBT community. As D'Emilio said, "The visibility we have achieved is like the air and water people need to survive."

Both he and Vaid, however, warned against the negatives of institutionalization and selective visibility. Vaid criticized the tendency of large institutions to lead from the top down rather than



'Neither protest nor politics will end the oppression of LGBT people. We must make a cultural shift, a shift that changes the moral values of our society.' — Urvashi Vaid

'We are up against a global system that reinforces inequality at all costs.' — John D'Emilio

the grassroots up, saying, "A movement does not consist of organizations, it consists of people." D'Emilio brought up that many of the most visible LGBT people are white, and that this misrepresents the wide diversity of the community.

"Until we shift the colors of our visibility," D'Emilio said, "visibility will remain a double-edged sword."

D'Emilio and Vaid also discussed the systemic and pervasive nature of the opposition to LGBT equality as well as the inequities found within the LGBT community. D'Emilio tied racial, gender, sexual and economic oppression to a larger system of inequality that builds power for the few rather than the many.

"We are up against a global system that reinforces inequality at all costs," he said. Focusing on the tendency of gains in equality in the LGBT community to benefit the wealthy, white and well-educated, he said, "We are up against the unequal distribution of the gains of our movement."

Vaid gave credit to the LGBT move-

ment for allowing women to attain positions of power, an achievement she said was not as common in other progressive movements. She stressed, however, that the LGBT movement had not done enough to build power in people of color communities and with other social justice issues, including poverty.

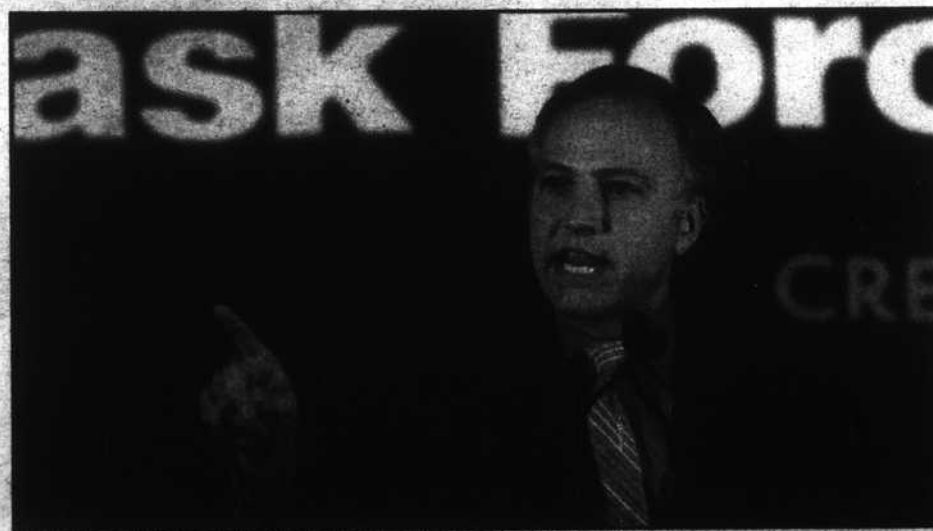
"Our politics of recognition needs to be married to a politics of redistribution. The progressive movement for greater justice is the mainstream of the LGBT movement, not a fringe group that has co-opted the queer movement," she said.

Most important, D'Emilio and Vaid encouraged LGBT people to see movement building as a long-term process.

D'Emilio brought up the positives and negatives of the same-sex marriage issue, saying that, "With same-sex marriage, we have found an issue that penetrates the homophobia of heterosexuals in our society."

He lamented, however, that, "mar-

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"It's time to stop running away from the moral values issue and seize it and go on the offensive," NGLTF Executive Director Matt Foreman said to rousing applause. "Let's start by claiming our moral values — liberty and personal freedom for all."