



graphic • Derek Marshall

“Hey Courtnay, how ya doin’?” “I’m a Black Gay man living in a white man’s world, how the hell do you think I’m doin’?”

Last November the York Caribbean Students Association held a forum at which several members of the Caribbean community spoke about their experiences of being homosexual.

The following is a transcript of a reading by Courtnay McFarlane, a member of our community.

by Courtnay McFarlane

When I agreed to speak at this forum, I did so with reluctance and a certain amount of fear. Speaking publicly about this issue and identifying oneself as a homosexual is difficult and in some environments, dangerous. But despite the difficulty I came because I believe my voice and visibility is empowering.

Speaking out as a Black man and as a Gay man is a challenge to the systems, structures and people that contribute to my oppression. I am a Black Gay man or a Gay man of African descent (pick any term). My Gayness is as intrinsic a part of my identity as my maleness, or my Blackness. My sexuality, gender and race are some of my identity, they are not by any means the sum total of who I am.

I, or rather we all have a multiplicity of identities making us unique individuals.

I am oppressed in this society as a Black man, and as a Gay man, but being Black and Gay is not double oppression.

The cause of my oppression as a Black man is not my race but racism — white supremacy. The cause of my oppression as a Gay man is not my sexual identity. The cause of my oppression is

heterosexuality and homophobia.

The distinction may be nebulous to some. But for me it is quite clear. For hundreds of years we, as Black people, have been given the message by those who oppress us that we are to some degree responsible and deserving of the racism we experience. There is nothing inherent to our native behaviour that justifies or causes racism. White supremacy causes racist oppression.

I have been taught to believe that my sexuality is somehow evil, abnormal, wrong and unnatural; that it is the reason I am

oppressed as a Gay man. The responsibility has been shifted from the oppressor to the oppressed. If I had continued to internalize these notions, question my nature and my right to freedom of sexual expression, I would not recognize the true source of the oppression (heterosexism/homophobia) and would offer no challenge to the power structure that oppresses me. Often we cannot come to the Black community as Black Gays and Lesbians, with all our identities. We are required and pres-

sured by the heterosexist, homophobic, patriarchal powers that be to choose to divide our identities. Choose race or sexuality.

If we choose race we remain closeted. If we choose sexuality we choose ostracism and isolation. Either way we remain silent and invisible — status quo maintained and oppression continues.

Women in our community have also been required to divide themselves in the name of Black liberation. They have been asked to leave their gender politics at the door and turn a blind eye to sexist oppression in the community. The front to work on is race, they are told.

As Blacks in a white supremacist society, we are tolerated, even accepted if we do not challenge racism and play down race politics. In short, we should check our race

want to participate, leave these issues elsewhere and remain silent.

I do not believe that we can work toward true liberation as a people if we continue to fight between ourselves as to who has the right to more freedom—men or women heterosexuals or homosexuals. We cannot challenge the white supremacist structure of this society if we are not united, if we do not see each others struggles as part of our own. We cannot effectively challenge racist oppression if we are ourselves participants in a system of oppression.

Black men must acknowledge the fact that sexism empowers us, despite the impact of racism on our lives. Heterosexuals must acknowledge that heterosexism

empowers them despite the impact of racism on their lives. Though we continue to be oppressed we must also recognize the ways in which we perpetuate

the oppression of other members of our community.

The power that we claim as men or heterosexuals, is often done at the expense of Black women, Black Lesbians, Gays, or Bisexuals—also members of our community.

The power that we take from each other is in the end, power that we take from ourselves. Our struggle should not be a horizontal one where we fight among ourselves for the largest piece of a small pie. It should be

a vertical one where we demand more pies for ourselves, our community to share.

The common problems we face as Blacks are too immense, and our common resources too scarce for us to continue to exclude each other on the basis of sexual preferences. Homophobia and the continual ignorance to and participation in the oppression of Black Gays and Lesbian cripples the resources of our community.

It requires tremendous energy to hate and exclude one another—as opposed to using our energy for the empowerment of the African community.

We can, and do, as Black Lesbians and Gays contribute socially, culturally and politically to the community. The homophobia and heterosexism that still exists in the Black community has forced us to be invisible participants. The homophobia and heterosexism that still exists in the Black community has pushed some of us away from what should be our home place — and we take with us our talents, energies and sometimes identification.

We can be Black Lesbians and Gays and be committed to Blackness and the liberation of our people no matter what gender we love. But our commitment will no longer be made at the expense of our identity as Black Lesbians and Gays. For the power that we take from each other is the power that we take from ourselves and our struggle should not be with each other but with white supremacy.

Courtney McFarlane OCA Student and Member of AYANGA (An organization for Gay Black Men in Toronto)

“We cannot effectively challenge racist oppression if we are ourselves participants in a system of oppression.”

identification at the door to be allowed in.

The belief is that we can only challenge one form of oppression at a time and that there are no parallels between various forms of oppression. The time is now to work against racism, sexism and maybe later, much, much later, sexuality.

Those who have the power — white, heterosexist, males (and in our community Black/heterosexist males)—prioritize our issues. Those of us with different identities and issues of oppression must, if we