

# TOWARD GENDER JUSTICE

Western States Center's **mission** is to build a progressive movement for **social, economic, racial & environmental justice** in the eight **Western states** of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada & Alaska.

Women & Transgender Peoples of Color Gathering, August 2006



A REPORT FROM THE FAMILY, COMMUNITY & SEXUALITY PROJECT

## BUILDING A MOVEMENT *from the Ground Up*

"We need more dialogues like these, which relate gender justice to racialized identities."

"[The gathering] was very thought-provoking. I appreciated the opportunity to explore new ideas."

—Participants  
*Women & Transgender  
People of Color Gathering  
August, 2006  
Portland, Oregon*

The progressive movement in U.S. is facing major challenges. One element we have yet to successfully address is the Right's strategy of using wedge issues like abortion and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights to divide us from our potential base. Their disciplined attack on these issues has silenced many of our allies, who fear dividing their constituencies by addressing these "hot button issues." In addition to this conundrum, we face critical challenges, including:

- ◆ Increased policy attacks on immigrant communities;
- ◆ Restrictions on family safety net programs; and
- ◆ Increased funding for programs that support marriage promotion.

Who is the most at risk within all of these policy debates?

Communities of color and low-income communities. The Right frames poverty as a result of bad moral character, the break down of family and a poor work





ethnic. Bring in a race analysis and it becomes clearer that false stereotypes of people of color frame multiple policy attacks on the stability of families in communities of color. From the war on drugs to criminal justice policy to inadequate health care, communities of color are routinely undermined in their ability to have healthy and safe families. Tellingly, the voices of these organizations and communities in these policy battles are not at the table nor are they informing the debate.

Because the Right has been so effective, there is a critical need to build deeper alliances between communities and groups that can weather debate and difference, not just among leadership, but at every organizational level. In 2005, Western States Center launched a new gender justice initiative—the **Family, Community & Sexuality Project**—designed to develop a cohesive progressive strategy and ongoing organizing around issues of marriage, family and sexuality and rooted in progressive "family values" principles.

To launch the program, we started by asking 17 organizations in the Western States Center region, including groups working with immigrants, queer people, people of color, rural women and youth, to talk to their membership about what the terms **family, community, and sexuality** meant to them. These 17 organizations came together to discuss their findings with the Center in April, 2006 in Boise, Idaho at the **Family Community & Sexuality Summit**. From the Summit came a set of Progressive Family Values Principles (*see the summit report on the Western States Center web site for full principles, [www.westernstatescenter.org](http://www.westernstatescenter.org)*).

Building on that conversation, Western States Center convened a gathering for women and transgender people of color in August 2006 to help deepen our gender justice work and develop new political education tools that can break down stereotypical patriarchal and racist notions of family, gender roles and sexuality. The **Women and Transgender People of Color Gathering** focused on one of the fundamental root causes of gender injustice and gender oppression: the very definition of gender that is used—a definition that has serious implications for both women and transgender people of color. For many participants, the gathering provided a safe and reaffirming space to explore these issues.

"While I don't identify as a woman (for the most part), I was still raised and socialized as a woman and can relate," explained one participant. "It was amazing to feel totally validated as a trans[gender] man and as a part of this community."

The goals of the Women and Transgender People of Color Gathering were to:

- ◆ Deepen and broaden the analysis-building work started at the Family, Community & Sexuality Project Summit;
- ◆ Begin integrating transphobia as an explicit and concrete part of the Family, Community & Sexuality Project;
- ◆ Test a new approach to a political education curriculum that successfully links the gender justice analysis to concrete public policies around reproductive justice; and
- ◆ Provide participants with discussion tools that address divisive public policy issues, which they can use within their own communities.

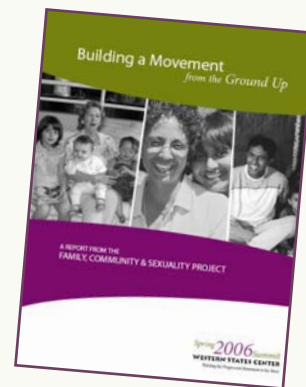
For women and transgender people of color in our region, geographic and cultural isolation form very real barriers to building a progressive movement. In one of the whitest parts of the country, with an overall population of only 16% people of color, activists and organizers of color frequently cite isolation as a barrier to work in their communities.

Many of the individuals who attended the **Women and Transgender People of Color Gathering** are not frequently at the same tables, because participants organize in different parts of the progressive movement and in different states. Creating a space where Seattle based Asian Pacific Islander organizers on queer rights could sit at the same table and engage in discussions with Latina immigrants from Boise was a unique opportunity.

One participant shared, "I enjoyed the ability for us to share and acknowledge the diversity that exists *within* our communities, something we are cheated out of often," while another individual commented, "I really appreciated that there was intentional space to include trans[gender] people of color-making the connection with trans[gender] issues to the "big picture."

Western States Center will take the lessons we have learned from summit and from the Women and

*We are incredibly excited to share our report from the recent Family, Community and Sexuality Project Summit, which took place in Boise, Idaho March 31st through April 1st, 2006. **Building a Movement from the Ground Up** tells the story of how 17 organizations in our region conducted grassroots research on challenges and opportunities facing our families and communities and then gathered to develop a set of progressive family values principles. Read the report on our web site at [www.westernstatescenter.org](http://www.westernstatescenter.org).*



### PROGRESSIVE FAMILY VALUES PRINCIPLES

1. Families are defined by the communities they are a part of and reflect the cultural and historical contexts from which they arise.
2. Self-determination and self-expression for communities are interconnected with family security and safety.
3. Supporting families and communities requires justice and equity at all levels of our education systems.
4. Relationships between families and communities are more important than national borders.
5. Gender Justice work requires a clear racial justice analysis and strategy.
6. Gender Justice must address gender roles and sexism.
7. Gender justice demands alternatives to state forms of power, like police and courts, in order for families and communities to thrive.
8. Valuing human rights over military power supports families.
9. Valuing people's multiple identities is necessary for creating solutions to the problems we face.
10. Progressive family values must address basic family needs of security and human dignity.

Transgender People of Color Gathering to develop workshops, handouts, film and video, and other materials that can be utilized by organizations interested in developing proactive gender justice strategies.

The Center's approach to developing political education is framed in an intersectional analysis rather than a single issue approach. We believe that political education curricula that focus on issues of family, community and sexuality must incorporate an analysis of how various institutions and policies disproportionately and negatively affect family stability in communities of color, immigrant and refugee communities and queer communities. For example: the Center's materials will include issues relating to criminal justice (war on drugs), TANF ("marriage promotion"), and immigration policy in addition to examples on abortion rights restrictions.

Over the next year, the Center will identify organizations that are ready to incorporate this approach, while also furthering the analysis in the region. Western States Center will then work with eight to ten organizations based in low-income, people of color, immigrant and refugee and queer communities in five states to support deep political education with leaders and members that translates into momentum for gender justice issue campaigns.

For the past thirty years, the progressive movement has been divided in our response to attacks from the Far Right about issues of reproductive rights, family policy, and sexuality. It is critically important that we develop a comprehensive, proactive approach that places our vision and communities at the center of the table. The Family, Community, and Sexuality Project will make a critical difference to the region, helping to ensure that the voices of the most affected are leading the charge, even as we build a new movement for progressive family values.

***For more information about the Family, Community and Sexuality Project and political education tools, please contact:***

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