

A Radical Vision Quest: VCLGR bringing Dr. Elias Farajajé-Jones to VT/NH

BRATTLEBORO -- The Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights is presenting a speaking tour by Dr. Elias Farajajé-Jones, an African- and Native-American bisexual AIDS activist and radical theologian. The series of talks, dubbed "A Radical Vision Quest," will allow Farajajé-Jones to speak on global AIDS issues, multicultural community building, and spiritual and political renewal. Presentations will be in Brattleboro on Friday, March 15; Hanover, NH, on Saturday, March 16; and Burlington on Sunday, March 17.

The tour is partly in response to the community request at VCLGR's annual Conference and Queer Town Meeting for regionally focused events around the state which recognize the multi-issue concerns of our communities and which could bring together diverse groups. In this spirit, VCLGR will be presenting Dr. Farajajé-Jones with the co-sponsorship of many community-based organizations working on a range of social justice issues -- from low-income advocacy to Native-American advocacy; from anti-racism to g/l/b/t liberation; from AIDS and HIV prevention to spirituality in all its forms.

Self-identified as a "Spanish speaking African Native American anarchist guerrilla theologian / AIDS terrorist / writer / cultural critic / performance artist / ritual technician," Farajajé-Jones is a Professor of Theology at Starr/King Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA, and previously was the first openly "queer" tenured faculty at Howard University. He has done pioneering work in the African-American community, especially its religious institutions, on dismantling homophobia and heterosexism. In addition, he is involved nationally in AIDS education and training in communities of color.

Elias is a commanding speaker and a handsomely imposing figure -- tall, about six-five with gold-tinged dread locks that hang to his waist. His presence is further reinforced by his multiple body piercings and tattoos. Much of his writing deals with "queers" in traditional cultures, new understandings of gender, and the construction of gender and sexualities.

As a bisexual activist Farajajé-Jones speaks to the concept that because sexuality and gender are fluid constructions there must be more than two genders. "We are not throwing out gay when we add bi, nor throwing out bi when we add trans, and not pitching the whole thing when we add questioning."

He talks about not allowing erotophobia (fear of sexuality) to keep us from teaching safe sex or dispensing condoms and dental dams, or to

marginalize our leather and S/M communities for being too sexual. He encourages movement beyond the world view which sees sexuality and spirituality in opposition and seeks to envision the erotic and the spiritual as bound up together. "We can hold many images in creative tension all at once," he instructs adding, "if we understand differently, we have to act in different ways."

Recently he was a featured plenary speaker at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Creating Change Conference in Detroit, where he spoke to the idea that, because we are a multi-issue community, it is only logical that ours must be a multi-issue movement as well. He warns that we cannot pull apart the pieces of who we are without causing irreparable damage. "We must stand in the middle of the intersection with all alienated, oppressed and marginalized people. We cannot liberate one group at the expense of the others. We must realize that we are a sacred people and that our walk is together."

Farajajé-Jones was featured as a "queer-identified bisexual" in *Newsweek's* July 1995 cover article on bisexuality, and has been arrested several times for civil disobedience concerning HIV/AIDS, Haiti, and national health care reform. He is founder of !!BAD!! (Bisexuals of African Descent), Moving Violations (a group for bisexual men of color) and AMBUSH! (Alliance of Multicultural Bisexuals United to Stamp Out Heterosexism), a direct action group of bisexual anarchists.

Co-sponsors and co-hosts for the Radical Vision Quest tour include OutRight Vermont, Vermont BiNet, Chittenden Community Action, Brattleboro Area AIDS Project, Hear Us OUT, Green Mountain Forest Watch, Brattleboro Union High School Diversity Team, Community Prevention Partnership, Antioch New England, School for International Training, ALANA Healthcare, and Interweave of the Unitarian Church.

Friday, March 15: 7:30 pm
Brattleboro (TBA)
Call Carey Johnson: 254-8263
(day), 258-2826 (eve)

Saturday, March 16: 4:00 pm
Church of Christ at Dartmouth
College, Hanover, NH
Call Dudley: 802-889-9413

Sunday March 17, 4:00 pm (reception to follow)
Unitarian Universalist Church,
Burlington
Call Lisa Rubin: 802-862-0251

All events are wheelchair accessible and ASL interpreted. Requested donation: \$3.00-\$8.00 (no one will be turned away for lack of funds) ▼

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