HIV/AIDS at the 2014 Creating Change Conference

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This year marked my first Creating Change experience. Glorified as the nation's premiere LGBTQ conference and an attraction for the head honchos of nonprofits and the organizers who follow them, Creating Change hosts a plethora of workshops, social gatherings and networking opportunities for all us queers. The conference spanned five days, ending on February 2, and was held this year in Houston at the Hilton.

I arrived on Friday afternoon with just enough time to register and get a glimpse of what was going on for the short time that I was able to attend. Then I led a presentation representing QUEEROCRACY on HIV criminalization advocacy and activism along with Robert Suttle and Reed Vreeland from the Sero Project. Afterward, as I rushed from floor to floor to get my quick fix of gay mayhem during my limited free time, I was overwhelmed and uneased by the amount of rainbow flags and corporate sponsors--not to mention all the free pens given away by lesbian and gay police officers and sheriffs recruiting queer youngins, a move that felt like a poor and dangerous substitution for real radical change. Even many of the HIV/AIDS vendors seemed unable to come up with anything more creative and attention-grabbing than a bowl of condoms and some tootsie rolls strewn across the table.

After solemnly perusing the vendor aisles, I checked out the schedule of events for the remainder of the day, hoping to make it to a few other HIV-related events after my presentation before I had to leave the next morning. But to my surprise nearly all of the HIV/AIDS presentations were being given at the same time on the same day. If building a stronger HIV/AIDS coalition and broadening your knowledge of that movement were your main objectives, then Creating Change was not going to let that happen easily. Among the incredible sounding workshops that I missed were "Action Plans Addressing Late HIV Testing in Latino Communities," "Lesbian Activism and Leadership Within the HIV/AIDS Epidemic" and "I Like it Bareback: Black Gays, Barebacking and the New Blue Pill," just to name a few. Although I'm sad to have missed them, I'm grateful that these topics had a chance to re-enter LGBTQ movement dialogue.

In the end, I was happy with the crowd of folks who came to our presentation on HIV criminalization, especially since it is rarely a topic that gets to sit at the table in such highly corporatized and neoliberal conferences as this one. I was happy that the HIV/AIDS community was also represented among the plenary speakers for the conference; these included Phil Wilson, president and CEO of the Black AIDS Institute, and Michael Kaplan, president and CEO of AIDS United.

My advice for Creating Change 2015 would be to make more room for the grassroots and give HIV/AIDS a

proper and much more welcoming reintroduction into the minds of LGBTQ activists young and old alike.

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