

11-03-2011

OLOC National Steering Committee Statement Against Racism and Classism

HERSTORY

OLOC has a herstory of standing against oppression. OLOC began in 1989, arising from two events for Old Lesbians held in California. The purpose was to gather Old Lesbians to: address issues of aging and ageism; advance personal empowerment and the celebration of the lives of Old Lesbians; combat ageism, sexism and racism. A caucus of 61 Old Lesbians who attended those events decided to form an ongoing organization to carry out the work. About 16 of them (two of them African American and the rest European American, including some Jewish Lesbians) continued meeting to establish OLOC.

OLOC's original statement of purpose was:

The OLOC (Old Lesbian Organizing Committee) is a national organization of Old Lesbians over 60 of all races formed to combat ageism within our own and the larger community; to rectify and disseminate information regarding other issues that affect our lives. (1989)

In 1991, when the first newsletter was published, the group was more specific about the other issues, stating:

The group plans to meet quarterly, to develop a network system and continue working to eradicate ageism in our Lesbian and feminist communities as well as society at large. We are also concerned about other issues that affect Old Lesbians, especially racism, sexism, and poverty as well as health, housing, and the environment.

Since then the mission statement (there has never been a statement defined as a vision statement) has undergone a few changes. The one in existence when OLOC held a National Gathering in Cleveland in 2010 is as follows:

Old Lesbians Organizing for Change is a national organization for Old Lesbians age 60 and over and will:

- Promote Old Lesbian Pride.
- Educate, support and empower Old Lesbians.
- Challenge ageism in our society and educate the general public about the effects of ageism and oppression.
- Celebrate our strengths, our talents, our experiences, and document our lives.
- Convene National Gatherings of Old Lesbians.
- Encourage, establish, and support local chapters and regional events

In the years since 1989, the organization has grown to a steady membership of close to 800 Old Lesbians. Some of the major accomplishments of OLOC are:

- writing a *Facilitators Handbook* for the use of Old Lesbian groups in addressing ageism;
- giving many workshops on ageism to other organizations;
- holding regular National and Regional Gatherings of Old Lesbians;
- publishing a quarterly newsletter (*The OLOC Reporter*);
- sponsoring the Arden Eversmeyer Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project;
- creating a Remembrance program for Old Lesbians who have died;
- sending birthday cards to members, some of whom have few or no family remaining;
- establishing the Del Martin Old Lesbian Pride Award;
- building and maintaining an online presence including a website (oloc.org), a Facebook page and a yahoo group;
- attending conferences, festivals, parades and other events as out and visible Old Lesbians;

- adopting resolutions and taking positions on single-payer health care, fair immigration laws, ending violence against women, and improving Medicare services, with others still to come;
- presenting regular workshops at National and Regional Gatherings on ending ageism, racism and classism;
- addressing ableism in OLOC and in the world;
- forming a number of local chapters;

Over the last two decades and more, an ongoing challenge for OLOC has been to address the inherent classism and racism within the organization in order to attract and truly include a wide diversity of Old Lesbians. Various tactics have been used without as much success as the organization wants. In addition, ageism is still rampant in the society and, despite ongoing work to eradicate it, the work continues.

At all of the National Gatherings held to date (seven by 2010), the issues of race and class have been topics of workshops and plenary sessions. The 2010 Plenary titled *What Should OLOC be Doing to Challenge Racism* led to an unscheduled meeting to continue the discussion about how to carry on the work more effectively.

At the Steering Committee following that National Gathering, community two Lesbians of Color attended. They spent several hours with the Steering Committee to assist them with ideas and suggestions about how to proceed.

At that meeting the Steering Committee agreed to act on the directive of the group at the unscheduled meeting at the Gathering.

Therefore, OLOC resolves to bring race and class to the forefront of our political analysis and practice. We will use this framework to better understand how ageism, Lesbophobia and sexism intersect, connect, and affect Old Lesbians. We want OLOC to more effectively advocate for change and bring about a just society. The present vision statement arose from that resolve:

Vision statement:

OLOC will be a cooperative community of Old Lesbian activists from many backgrounds. OLOC's priorities will be to challenge and oppose ageism, racism, classism, sexism and ableism. OLOC will collaborate with other organizations doing the work of social justice. OLOC will use its power and resources to advance the just world we all envision. OLOC will seek leadership from Old Lesbians of Color and Old Lesbians of a variety of class backgrounds in these efforts to address multiple oppressions, including as advisors to and members of the Steering Committee.

Goals: internal

1. The present OLOC Steering Committee members, all of us white Old Lesbians, acknowledge that we are all “works in progress” and we commit to deepening our understanding of oppression in all of its forms and to identifying our own power and privilege and holding ourselves accountable.
2. The OLOC Steering Committee will develop an analysis of the intersections of race and class as they affect Old Lesbians and incorporate the knowledge into all of our activities.
3. The OLOC Steering Committee will identify and work with individuals and/or organizations to help us develop an actively anti-racist and anti-classist practice and identity.
4. The OLOC Steering Committee commits to incorporating and interweaving this consciousness into everything we are and do and will allocate significant time at each National Steering Committee meeting to advancing these goals.
5. The OLOC Steering Committee will work to define and publish working position papers indicating our priorities, how we see all oppressions linked, and what specific work we will undertake.

Goals: External

1. OLOC will establish a list of advisors to provide consultation, guidance, and accountability to our Steering Committee about our anti-racism and anti-classism work.
2. OLOC will build bridges, coordinate and actively work with other inclusionary, diverse groups working for social justice. We prioritize groups that include Lesbians of Color and poor and working class Lesbians and especially groups working on ageism issues.
3. OLOC National Gatherings will advance the priorities of challenging ageism, racism, classism, sexism and ableism.
4. OLOC will initiate actions which may include but not be limited to:
 - a) Educating ourselves and the general public about unacceptable socio-political conditions for Old Lesbians in areas such as housing, health care, mental health, employment, ability to safely be out, etc.
 - b) Educating ourselves and others about the environmental, medical and social needs we face as we age.
 - c) Educating people about the economic status of Old Lesbians.
 - d) Supporting universal healthcare.
 - e) Supporting expanded Medicare coverage.
 - f) Supporting fair immigration laws.
 - g) Protecting social security.
 - h) Supporting efforts to reduce the epidemic of violence against women and girls.
 - i) Supporting fair labor practices and collective bargaining.
 - j) Supporting housing the homeless and the development of low-cost permanent housing.
 - k) Supporting the individual Lesbian.

OLOC is working to establish an action plan with timelines for accomplishing the actions above.