

# AKHÉ

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A JOURNAL FOR LESBIANS OF AFRICAN DESCENT



### **Cover Artist's statement**

Simone Bouyer - Twenty-nine year old African American lesbian with knotty hair. Currently editor and publisher of Planet Roc Arts Journal. Most recently owner of the now defunct Wholesome Roc Gallery, Museum & Cafe. Has exhibited works in Chicago bars, coffeehouses and newspapers; also exhibited works at Houseworks Gallery in Ottawa, Canada. "It is my objective as an artist to bring the general public closer to each other in such a way that they become conscious of the world and the effect we each have on it through the role models depicted in my portraits."

*In addition to the cover, Simone Bouyer's work appears on the back cover, and on pages 18 and 32*

## **From the Editor**

Welcome to the first issue of Aché created by a brand new team of editors. We, there are nine of us, are committed to a year of developing the journal—adding our 2 cents. Then we hope to hand over the job to another set of energetic, creative sisters to carry the torch and expand upon our accomplishments.

Aché is in transition. We're coming out of the winter and the war, and we're moving into spring where there are opportunities for new starts and a fresh look—at the world (with the threat of a "new world order" ever on our minds) and our local communities.

As you read through this issue, you will meet Imani, Blake, Natalie, Amana, Winn, Ekua, Paula, and Akiba, Aché's editors. We pulled this issue together in record speed, and it's already time for us to collect the pieces for the next issue. We need your help. Please send in your work: art/photography/graphics, essays, interviews, profiles, reviews, features (based on the theme), fiction, poetry, and anything that you'd like to add to the new sections.

We want to hear from all of the women of African descent who love women, whether they call themselves lesbians, dykes, bisexual, single, married, in distant fascination, mothers, straight... This is your home. Come on out of the school room, take a break from the non-union j-o-b, stop and step from 'round the speaker's podium, inch down the ladder of your corporate career, walk across the border of your hometown, come out of isolation, and come home.

As a member of the original Aché core group, I'd like to personally welcome all of the women who have recently joined our committees. (There's still plenty of room, believe me.) Though many of you have been sending your work to fill up Aché's pages or your letters to offer words of encouragement, it doesn't provide quite the same kind of fuel as the body warmth of black women—working with you, holding up your back, keeping you sane.

The pickings have been slim sometimes as we've labored to pull together the journal or do an event. The six to eight women who have kept Aché going over the past two years have usually had both arms full. I can't tell you how much easier it's been to breathe as the committees begin to add faces and the women in our community find their nitch in the organization.

*(continued next page)*

## EDITORIAL THEMES

The editorial theme will be used to direct the content of the feature stories. However, other editors may choose to tap into the theme as they develop their sections for each issue.

We encourage submissions for any particular theme to be sent in as early as possible.

**June/July**

Disability

**August/September**

Who We Are & Who We Love

**October/November**

Cycles of Life

**December/January**

Health

**February/March**

(Anniversary issue)

Diversity of Sexual Expressions

The deadlines are on the first Monday of the month, two months preceding publication date.

*From the Editor (continued)*

Out of the mouths of these new members, I've even begun to hear echos of the words I've spoken many times since I've been with Aché: This is hard; this is overwhelming; this makes me feel vulnerable; I'm scared. And I've been able to respond: Hey, I know. What can we do for each other to make it easier? And, I don't want to lose you, what can you handle right now or what else might you need to keep going?

We, as African-American women, are famous for our juggling act. Everyone digs us when we speed into fifth gear. It brings us standing ovations—before the house empties and we are left alone to heal after we have performed such wonders. This ability to carry on in so many arenas is something incredible and worth loving in ourselves. And yet, we have to learn—or help each other learn—that we are still lovable if we aren't juggling it all at once, and that it's okay to stop sometimes or take on less. Or ask for help.

We come together because we all share this very special knowledge—that loving women is like, well, like loving a piece of heaven on earth—but it doesn't mean that we necessarily have very much else in common. We're all of African descent, but I'm bi-racial, my mother comes from working class, German-English, small town Iowa stock; my father's people hail from the Midwest as well, with grandparents who worked their lives away in the post office and a family cleaners—middle class black folks in those days. How many of you fit that description or come out of that experience?

We come from incredibly different experiences. And it's scary sometimes to work together—on a personal level it means trusting, which usually causes us a fair amount of inner turmoil; on a global level it often leads to war. Hence, our theme for this issue: "War & the Wars We Wage Within Ourselves."

But in working together, we benefit from a whole lot of support and good feelings. I want to invite any of you who want this experience to join us.

Aché is like a bird. Her wings are strong enough to carry us all. I can see us now: holding on to this great span of vision, screeching, tumbling and giggling, while we lend our ideas, our experiences, our skills, our voices and our love to each other. This is the Aché I want to see happen.

So, welcome. As the editor who gets to write this column, I'd like to say on everyone's behalf that we are looking forward to a year of challenge and rewards and growth, which usually comes from looking truth in the face and struggling with it.

We plan to come out smiling.

DeeAnne



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Tiamaya, Healing & Spirituality

**LAY-OUT/DESIGN**  
Janet Wallace

Aché (pronounced a-shay or a-chay) is a bi-monthly publication by lesbians of African descent\* for the benefit of all black women. The journal serves to reflect and celebrate the wide spectrum of our experiences. We are committed to open and critical dialogue about the issues affecting our lives, but Aché will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to ourselves as lesbians of African descent. We especially encourage submissions from women who have never been published. The editors will work with all contributors to ensure that the final published text has been mutually agreed upon.

The appearance of names or images in this publication does not indicate the sexual orientation of that person or persons.

The deadline for submissions is the first Monday two months prior to publication: April 1, June 3, August 5, October 7 & December 2. Neatly handwritten, typed materials and 3.5" Macintosh disks using MacWrite or Microsoft Word are accepted. Include name, address, and telephone on all submissions and a biographical statement no longer than 20 words. Please specify if you do not want your full name reproduced in Aché. Don't submit originals; we do not have the resources to return them. (Or enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope.)

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Aché is dedicated to the memory of Pat Parker and all the black women who have passed before us and whose work we continue today.

\*By using the terminology "lesbians of African descent," we are able to acknowledge women of different shades and hues from every corner of the globe.

## Table of Contents

Letters to Aché	4
<b>Local and International Issues</b>	
Women of Color Speak Out Against the War in the Persian Gulf	6
Homelessness: Causes and Solutions <i>Rebecca Hall, Esq.</i>	7
Gays and Lesbians of African Descent Take Issue	10
<b>Conference Report</b>	
I'm Out—Now What? <i>Ekua Omosupe</i>	12
<b>Health</b>	
Round Brown and Beautiful <i>Ntombi</i>	15
<b>Lifestyles</b>	
Winnings Words: Smart Bombs=Dumb People <i>Winn Gilmore</i>	18
Loving and Hating Through War and Peace <i>Denise G.</i>	19
They're Fighting for Me? <i>Winn Gilmore</i>	20
<b>Poetry</b>	
Untitled <i>Ekua Omosupe</i>	22
Desert Storm <i>María Cora</i>	23
War Stories <i>Dawn Lundy</i>	24
Untitled <i>Lambert Van Buuren</i>	25
To the Survivors <i>Nita</i>	26
Anger Turned Inward <i>Shakira</i>	27
<b>Arts and Culture</b>	
Sister Hold On <i>Paula Ross</i>	28
Inner Spirit: Outer Vision <i>DeOrr</i>	31
<b>Healing and Spirituality</b>	
What Do I See...? <i>Akiba Tiamaya</i>	33
Journal Entries <i>Honoré, Lynn Scott</i>	35
Yearnings (For all the children) <i>Shirley O. Steele</i>	36
Free Dumb Days <i>Olosunde</i>	38
<b>Fiction</b>	
Crazy from the Heat <i>Uzuri Amini</i>	40
<b>Features</b>	
I Will Not Fight For You <i>Natalie Devora</i>	44
Women Resisters <i>Paula Ross</i>	47
<b>Bulletin Board</b>	50
<b>Calendar</b>	52

We've got an office number!  
It's (415) 849-2819.

## Letters

### An Open Letter to Aché Readers:

This letter is a response to the boycott being called against the Blazing Redheads by Lillie Robinson, a former member of the band, and her supporters. It is difficult to answer the charges that have been made without appearing defensive, but we feel a responsibility to present a broader perspective on the conflict. This matter is complex and therefore, difficult to consolidate into one letter.

The Blazing Redheads (a band having no legal partnership) entered into an agreement in Sept. 1990 with Reference Recordings to cut an album, working with producer Frank Dorritie. Songs were selected by the record label and producer and the list presented to the band was open for discussion. Tension arose with Lillie's dissatisfaction of the list, and she stated several times that she wanted the band to move in a more commercially accessible direction. Historically, including the 3 years before Lillie's joining, the band has continuously and cooperatively refined a style alternative to today's pop market.

We felt artistic differ-

ences were at the core of the conflict. Lillie felt that her contribution to the band was not being taken seriously. She expressed feeling racism from both Frank and the band. Several resolution attempts between individual band members and Lillie, as well as a collective band meeting, failed to stop ensuing communication breakdown. We suggested mediation to Lillie several times. She refused, maintaining it would be fruitless. Tension amongst all parties escalated, culminating 3 weeks before the recording date in an extremely angry verbal assault by Lillie towards the producer. The rehearsal ended because it was impossible to continue in this stressed atmosphere.

The record label and the producer quickly presented the band with 3 options to deal with Lillie's unprofessional actions: 1) cancel the project, 2) find another producer, or 3) find another bassist. Our decision to split with Lillie was a painful one. It was made reluctantly after it had become impossible to work together. We see this as a lose/lose situation. We lost not only a friend and a talented band member, but also the opportunity to perform and record her material. (Contrary to the assertions made in the letter, the album will contain

none of Lillie's input. Also, all financial obligations to Lillie have been fulfilled.)

After the split, Lillie repeatedly and seriously threatened band members with physical violence. Only after these threats did Lillie make her first offer of mediation (one week before the recording date). This offer was explicitly made only as a means for her to play on the album. For these reasons we turned down her offer.

Racism exists. We do not support it and are constantly struggling to unlearn it.

The Blazing Redheads have been a part of the community for over 5 years. While we indeed have gained our musical inspiration from Afro-Cuban, jazz, R&B, funk and Latin idioms, we are drawn to this music by a longheld love and sincere respect for the rich traditions from which they come.

We appreciate what the community has given us, and we will continue to support the community in return.

The Blazing Redheads

Michaëlle Goerlitz, Klaudia Promessi, Danielle Dowers, Donna Viscuso

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To the Letters Department:

I felt compelled to write this letter primarily (1) to give support and encouragement to Sacul L'Adnbre, founder and director of the newly-formed Sapphire Theatre Company, the only Bay Area lesbian, women of color, theatrical group, and (2) to present another perspective of the production "Lesbfriends," which was a fund-raising benefit for Aché.

I feel a grave disservice has been done to Sacul and members of the "Lesbfriends" cast. Specifically, I refer to the letter written by Renaye Brown criticizing the production and the response to that letter by Lisbet, producer of the Aché series. Both letters appeared in the Feb./Mar. 1991 issue of Aché.

After reading Ms. Brown's letter, I was appalled by Ms. Brown's borderline viciousness and anger with which she criticized the production. It appeared there was absolutely nothing of value to be gained from the production. This is not only hard to believe but I did not find that to be true. I thought the play was funny, delightful and entertaining, not to mention seeing our "own" black women on stage, live. I found myself wondering how the play would be developed as it was announced that the

production was and is a "work-in-progress." Even so, Ms. Brown, like everyone else, is entitled to her own opinion.

Clearly an insult to Sacul and members of the cast and a tremendous disappointment was Lisbet's response to Ms. Brown. Regardless of the mixed reviews of the performance, Lisbet's letter seemed self-serving and lacked common decency by not giving any appreciation for all the time, money and effort freely given by Sacul and others. I cannot for one moment believe that Sapphire Theatre Company did not try to do the best possible job. In the final analysis, Aché received at least one benefit from that performance—fund raising dollars. Therefore, shouldn't some credit be given to Sapphire Theatre Company? Yes, I think so. It is a shame and rather rude to ride on the backs of sisters without even a thank you.

Why do we have to continue harming each other when the very essence of who we are is constantly being denied, criticized and challenged every day. We can give constructive criticism to each other. We can share our knowledge. And we can give support and encouragement to those who risk taking a challenge. Sacul and the members of

the cast deserve our support as Aché did in its infancy. Aché means "the power to make things happen." That's what Sapphire Theatre Company is all about, plus more. Sacul and Sapphire Theatre Company have the "courage to make things happen." Can't we at least let Sapphire Theatre Company grow and develop. We did for others! Sapphire Theatre Company I applaud you!

Ayanna Nsenga

Dear Sisters:

It has been brought to my attention that you have, over the last few months, been continuously running the BLACK LACE call for submissions. I want to take the time to formally thank you for such a generous effort! I believe that if Black organizations more consistently worked together, we'd get a helluva lot more done in our communities.

In this spirit, I will advertise Aché free of charge, in BLACK LACE. Should you find this problematic, please contact me. I realize that many sisters do not approve of erotica, so I certainly don't want to cause any unnecessary problems for Aché. If this arrangement pleases you, then I will happily go ahead with advertising your jour-

nal. Much success to you! And again, thank you for your generosity.

Alycee J. Lane, Editor

Dear Editor,

There is a war being fought on U.S. grounds. Violent people are using weapons to hurt women. These weapons include gender discrimination, sexual harassment, rape, battering, homicide, and so-called crimes of passion. Abuse by violent people against women is rampant in America. This war has been fought on U.S. soil for nearly five hundred years.

Women are veterans of domestic war. Ten women per day are murdered by their male partners for trying to secure independence from relationships. So, women should be given the same financial breaks and opportunities as veterans of foreign wars. In the recent election, foreign war veterans won the right to have taxpayers indirectly give them money to buy houses. This is a right that many women have earned by fighting for years in the domestic war. Yet, these women, who are also usually the caretakers of children and men (including veterans), won no funds from taxpayers or the government in this election.

The measures in Proposition 134 would have funded services for battered women and children and for alcoholics. It would have used money derived solely from alcohol sales in the amount of a nickel per drink. It might have made alcoholic beverages less desirable and less accessible. It might have decreased the incidence of child abuse through alcoholism and alcoholic pregnancy. Homicides resulting from alcoholism and drunken rage might have also decreased. Also, homicides would have decreased as women and children who are now imprisoned in the houses of violent people would have been provided alternative shelter.

Proposition 134 would have sheltered battered women from the war waged against them. It would have given some of these veterans at least a mattress on a floor and a conversation with someone who understands their plight. This is a far cry from financial support to buy a house. Maybe the proposition lost because it didn't ask enough. The next ballot should give us a chance to vote for equal rights in housing funds. We should be asking whether everyone who has fought to preserve jeopardized American freedoms and rights deserves to have

*(continued on page 11)*

## Local and International Issues

# WOMEN OF COLOR SPEAK OUT AGAINST THE WAR IN THE PERSIAN GULF

We are the Revolutionary Sisters of Color, a socialist feminist autonomous women of color organization. We call for an immediate cease-fire in the Persian Gulf and a halt to the U.S.-led coalition bombing of Iraq. Women of color are over 50% of the U.S. female troops in the Gulf. We are the mothers of troops and the grandmothers, aunts, sisters, and caretakers of the children already left behind and of the ones who will be orphaned. We understand the particular devastation that war represents in our communities. While the U.S. spends billions of dollars on weapons of destruction, our vital needs such as AIDS research, housing, health care, jobs, and other necessities of life go unmet.

We can best support our brothers and sisters stationed in the Middle East by demanding that the U.S. government bring them home alive *now*. We recognize that people in our communities are forced into the military due to the lack of jobs and economic resources. We also support equal rights for women, lesbians and gay men in the military.

We stand in solidarity with the women in the Middle East who, like us, do not have control, choices or access to the male constructed power structures in their countries.

We stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people and their right to self-determination and with all Arab people in the Middle East who are the main victims of this imperialist slaughter for domination of the world's resources. We call for an end to Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and Lebanon. We are opposed to any imperialist intervention in and post-war occupation of the Gulf.

We stand in solidarity with all those who resist the war. We are fully aware of the connection between the U.S. government's racist war of Third World people, whether it be in Iraq, Panama, Grenada, Nicaragua or within U.S. borders against all people of color.

We believe that to end this war we must build an anti-war movement that is anti-capitalist, feminist, anti-racist, open and democratic. We encourage the anti-war movement to allow equal input from all political perspectives opposed to the war. This movement and its leadership must include people who are censored to achieve "respectability," particularly political radicals, feminists, lesbians and gay men, youth, the differently abled, and people of color including our elders.

We need to bring home to all oppressed peoples that this genocidal war, caused by capitalism/imperialism and provoked by the economic crisis, is directed against us as well as against people in the Middle East. This war is a symptom of a dying economic system based on profit. This system is desperately trying to prop itself up through increased militarization, censorship and manipulation of the media, and to contain mass rebellion through police occupation and brutalization of our communities, F.B.I. harassment, and the suppression of civil rights.

We believe that women of color have a pivotal role to play in forging a movement to speed the demise of capitalism and to usher in a new society where human needs and the flourishing of human cultures are of the first priority—a socialist feminist democracy.

Revolutionary Sisters of Color  
P.O. Box 2798  
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

*Editor's Note: Even though the cease-fire has occurred in the Persian Gulf, this statement speaks to the on-going domestic war we are faced with as women of color and reminds us of our connection to people of color worldwide struggling against greed and domination.*

Greetings from the new Political Action Committee of the Aché Project! As our mission statement states, we have formed a committee to assist in the creation of a political agenda for our community, to include networking/coalescing with other communities. To develop a strong Black lesbian presence in political issues that are current. To make connections with the Black community and with other oppressed people.

One of our committee's functions is to have an article in each issue of Aché which addresses something political that impacts our community. We are starting out with the following article on homelessness. If you want to join our committee, be on our mailing list, write something for our column, or even just give us your feedback, call Reatha Fowler at 831-1552.

## **HOMELESSNESS: CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS**

by Rebecca Hall, Esq.

At least 163,621 and as many as 189,927 people were homeless at some point in the Bay Area between July 1988 and June 1989. There were 20,416 homeless families during some point in 1990, which comes to 73,510 parents and children. These figures are based on the number of applications for homelessness assistance through the Departments of Social Services. There are many more who never apply for this type of help. These figures do not include those living in parks, under bridges or in cars, or the tens of thousands of people sleeping on the floors of friends' houses.<sup>1</sup>

The homelessness "crisis" has been with us for so long now that we begin to think that it is just a way of life. This is not the truth. In the richest country in the world people

are living on the streets without adequate shelter for specific reasons. This country has the resources to solve this problem and house every person in this country.

In order to solve a problem, it is crucial to find out what has caused it. Although an increase in poverty in this country is the simple answer, homelessness is really caused by "shelter poverty." It is not just about being poor. There have been other periods in American history where there has been vast amounts of poverty, but it wasn't until the late 1970s that for so many being poor meant not having a place to live. However, we still need to understand the reality of poverty in this country today to understand the root causes of homelessness.

### **POVERTY**

Why are there so many poor people in this country today? The causes can be traced back to the early 1970s. During this period there was a shift from an economy that was based on manufacturing to an economy based on the provision of services. This shift resulted in fewer jobs for the working class. The jobs that exist in today's service-based economy provide very low pay for "unskilled" work and a much higher pay for skilled work, causing a huge income spread, i.e., those who are "unskilled" get paid far less than those who are skilled. The chart on the next page illustrates the decline in wages for poor people in this country.

While the factories began to close down across the country, not only



were displaced workers forced into ridiculously low-paying jobs, many were forced out of the workforce all together, with a disproportionate impact on African Americans. Over one-half of African American men of working age are unemployed, and this does not take into account those who are underemployed.

lack of access to childcare for low-income women make this problem even worse.

In addition, as it became more and more impossible to find work for a living wage, the amount of public benefits declined. The real value of public benefits have not risen since the early 1970s, despite over 20 years of

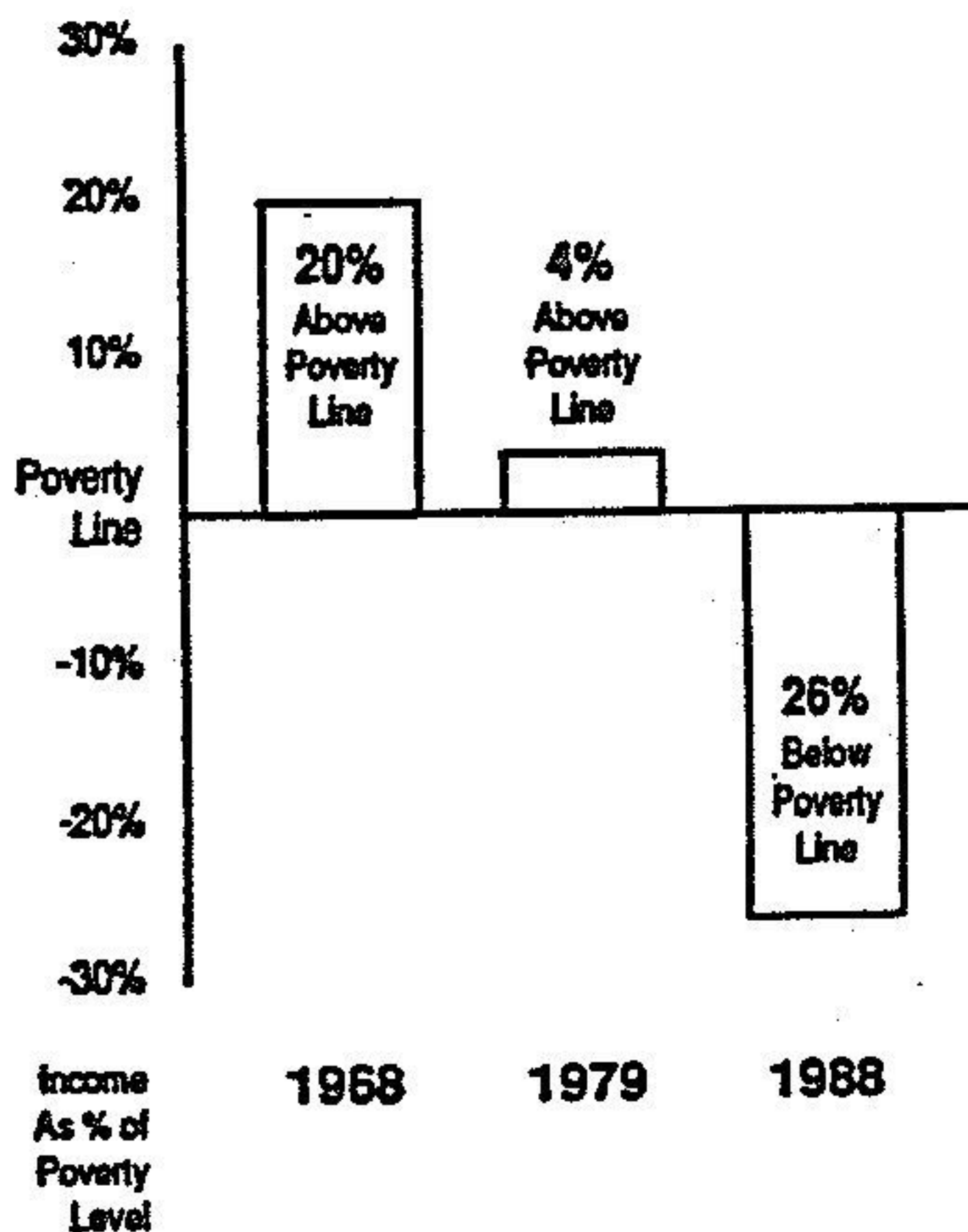
tion of housing are all determined by the private sector of the housing market, i.e., real estate developers, builders, materials producers, mortgage lenders, investors, speculators, landlords, and homeowners. None of these people have an interest in keeping the cost of housing down. Production of housing becomes expensive because of the high cost of land, high interest loans on construction, and the use of materials manufactured by big corporations that dominate the market and have no incentives for cost control.

Once construction of housing is completed, speculators enter the picture and make a bad situation worse. Speculators buy property and hold onto it — waiting for the price to go up. They pass it on to another speculator who holds onto it and who sells it after the price goes up again. The property continues to pass from speculator to speculator and each purchase is financed by high interest loans from banks, which raises the cost of mortgage payments, making the price go up even further.<sup>3</sup>

The high cost of housing combined with the growing rate of poverty causes homelessness. It used to be that lower middle class and working class people could actually afford to buy a home. Now you have to be in the upper middle class. In San Francisco, for example, a bank will not consider lending you money for a home unless you make at least \$70,000 a year.

The high cost of buying homes forces middle-income people out of the buying market and into the rental market. Before the '70s, the only people who needed to rent housing were poor people, and landlords had to set their prices for that market. Now the rental market caters to the middle class who can afford higher rents, and low rents become non-existent. Poor people are forced to spend a very high percent-

**Annual Income from Working Full-time at Minimum Wage in Relation to the Poverty Line for a Family of Three**



Another cause of the high rate of poverty today also began in the '70s and is described as the "feminization of poverty." Just as the divorce rate began to soar, it became necessary for a family to have two incomes to survive. Women have always been paid less than men, and when women are the family providers, it forces a lot of women below the poverty line. The

inflation.

During this period, the price of housing did not stand still. Combined with a rise in poverty, the increasing cost of housing has caused many people to become homeless.<sup>2</sup>

#### SHELTER POVERTY

Why does housing cost so much? The supply, cost, quantity, and loca-

age of their income on rent.

Taking Alameda County as an example, it becomes clear that poor people have to choose between feeding their families and paying their rent. In Berkeley, the median rent for a rent-controlled two bedroom apartment is \$465, and for a non-rent-controlled apartment it is \$564. The median rent for a two bedroom in other parts of Northern Alameda County is \$625, and in South County it is \$675.<sup>4</sup> The federal poverty line for a family of three is \$880 per month. This means that a family at the poverty line would spend 53% of their income on rent in a Berkeley rent-controlled apartment, 67% of their income on rent in a non-rent controlled unit, 71% of their income on rent in Northern Alameda County and 76% in South County. This assumes that this family of three has enough income to reach the poverty line, which is no simple task these days. If this family were receiving AFDC, they would be spending 71.6% of their income on rent in a Berkeley rent-controlled unit, 85.5% in a non-rent-controlled unit, 90% in North County and 97.2% in South County.<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, leaving the fate of poor people in the hands of the private housing market makes people homeless. What then is the government doing to help the situation?

The answer is, basically, nothing. Since 1980, when the housing crisis began to get worse, federal aid for low-income housing was cut 75% from \$32 billion to \$7.5 billion per year. (A large portion of what was left was stolen during the HUD scandal.) At the beginning of Reagan's first term, the U.S. spent \$7 for "defense" for every \$1 spent on housing. Now the government spends \$44 for "defense" for every \$1 spent on housing. If this country committed itself to a war on

homelessness as tenaciously as it committed itself to a war on Iraq, there would be no homelessness. And now Bush plans to spend \$100 billion on rebuilding Kuwait.

Not only has the government been doing nothing to stop homelessness, it is subsidizing the private housing market! It does this by insuring loans to private investors and bailing out banks that have made home loans that are too risky. It gives home owners huge tax breaks by giving tax deductions on interest and depreciation, even on second and third homes. In fiscal year 1987 these tax deductions cost the U.S. Treasury \$50 billion. This money, which could have been collected and given to build housing, was instead given to the richest 1/6th of the population. What is given away in tax benefits each year to home owners is almost five times what the government spends on low-income housing!

### SOLUTIONS

People are forced to live on the streets in this country because of greed. This government treats housing as a commodity like food processors or airline tickets and not as a *right*. Access to decent, affordable housing is a right, not a privilege for those who can buy it.

More jobs must be created that pay a living wage. Public benefits should be raised so that recipients can at least be at the poverty line. There must be free childcare and healthcare.

The creation of housing needs to be taken out of the hands of the private housing market. This can be done by buying tax delinquent property and transferring it to social ownership. By social ownership, I mean the operation of housing solely for the benefit of the people who live there, and the residents own it. They would have all

of the rights of other homeowners but they would not be allowed to re-sell the property for profit.<sup>6</sup> Housing should be built by non-profit agencies whose whole purpose is to create and maintain affordable housing. The government should place high taxes on speculation and use this money to develop low-income housing.

There are many other solutions that can be implemented to end homelessness. Some of the ones mentioned above have already been put into place on the local level and have been very successful. Ultimately, homelessness will end when the people of this country force the government to change its priorities. When that is done, the rest is simple.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics from HomeBase, "The Number of Homeless People in the 9-County Bay Area, July 1988-June 1989."

<sup>2</sup> Hopper and Hamberg, "The Making of America's Homeless: From Skid Row to the New Poor, 1945-1984," *Critical Perspectives on Housing*, Temple University Press, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Achtenberg and Marcuse, "The Causes of the Housing Problem," *Critical Perspectives on Housing*, Temple University Press, 1986.

<sup>4</sup> Bay Area Council, Survey on Advertised Median Rents, 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Hall, "Homelessness and Preventing Evictions: The Need for Legal Representation for Low-Income People," 1991.<sup>6</sup> For more information on social ownership and other solutions to homelessness, see *The Right To Housing, A Blueprint for Housing the Nation*, the Institute for Policy Studies' Working Group on Housing, 1989.

*Rebecca Hall is an attorney at the Berkeley Community Law Center, specializing in homelessness prevention. She has worked in the area of homelessness for over six years.*

# **Lesbians and Gays of African Descent Take Issue:**

Statement to the members of the planning  
committee of the national OutWrite '91

*Edward Albee, noted writer, claimed at OutWrite '91, the national lesbian and gay writer's conference, that being a "quadruple minority" (white, Protestant, gay, male) has not hindered him. This statement is a response to the OutWrite '91 planning committee, which chose Albee as the conference's keynote speaker.*

The members of the Ad-Hoc Caucus of Lesbian and Gays of African Descent met in response to Edward Albee's keynote address on Friday, March 1, 1991. Many of us took serious objection to points that he made in his speech. However, in discussing the points of Albee's address, we discovered larger issues which may undermine the conference's purpose, organization, and ambience. Here we would like to introduce our concerns.

The first concern that arose in the keynote address is to Albee's characterization of himself as minority. It is true that in a world where people of color are in the majority, and in which women out-number and out-live men, Albee is indeed a minority. But what he failed to acknowledge, and what we recognize, is that he occupies a position of privilege. It is not Edward Albee who we wish to target here, for we recognize his contribution to gay letters. In fact, we are grateful that his remarks generated a discussion between people of color\* who otherwise might not have come together at this conference.

Below are our concerns about the conference as a whole that took place during a dialogue within our Caucus.

## **OBJECTIONS**

We do not wish to censor or deny any speaker her or his right to speak, but rather we insist there be an open forum in which people may take constructive issue with the same for the good of the order.

We appreciate the listing of celebrated gay male authors for their contributions to our movement and literature, but we object to the citing of examples from one culture or from one segment of our community without giving recognition to others, or indicating that others are known to exist.

We recognize that positions of privilege and power among us have been hard won, but it is inappropriate for white gay male authors, editors, and publishers, to fail to acknowledge the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic tenor of the times.

We recognize, too, that the conference organizers must recruit volunteers and work against the constraints of other peoples' schedules and commitments in their daily lives, and they will not always be able to find competent and unencumbered assistants from the many ethnicities that exist, but the task of including a representative sample of our diverse gay cultures [i.e. African American, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, Semitic People, (Arab and Jewish People of Color), Chicano, Latino as well as bisexuals and people with disabilities] on the planning committee must become an absolute prerequisite.

We understand the constraints of finding representative people of color for every panel and every topic, but if the conference is to represent our truly diverse community, there must be a commitment to an ambience of natural inclusion. It is no longer acceptable to us to have you say, "We can't find qualified people from various communities to fill panel positions or to deliver keynote addresses" because we have visible organizations with whom you can network.

We understand that scholarships were available to attend this conference, but scholarship criteria were not publicized adequately, and it was not clear how these funds were to be allocated. There was inadequate information about whom to contact for scholarships; the information was difficult to access, even upon request, which made it appear that there was an "inside" and biased distribution of funds. By the same token, accommodations for panelists appeared to be arbitrary as well.

We assert that, as participants at this conference, we are a literate and intellectual asset to the gay and lesbian literary community, but we sense the naive and distasteful assumption that minorities are not intellectuals.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We recommend that keynote speakers better reflect the multiculturalism of the community.

We recommend that persons of color be included on every panel, and that persons of color serve as moderators.

We recommend that the organizers affirm the use of inclusive language.

We recommend that people of color be included in committees selecting speakers and developing panels. However, the responsibility of including people of color in this conference should not be left with one or two people from that group. We further recommend that organizers publicize the conference in national and local lesbian and gay people of color publications in the form of paid advertising.

We recommend that moderators be trained to have a broad enough understanding of their topics so that they can facilitate a discussion that integrates diverse perspectives and that multi-cultural training be a part of the planning process.

We recommend that conference organizers improve information and clarify criteria for available scholarships and develop a clear policy for determination of recipients.

We recommend also that the goals of the conference be clearly stated with regard to issues of inclusivity. Such a statement ought to prevent some of the problems that have plagued this conference.

Lastly, we insist upon publication of this letter in OUTLOOK magazine.

#### **PLEDGES**

We pledge to provide assistance in providing possible panelists and moderators.

We pledge to provide a bibliography that includes the works of people of color so that moderators will be more capable of including our voices.

We pledge to remain in dialogue with you so that the conference fully serves all of its attendees.

#### **FINAL REMARKS**

Last year SDiane Bogus and Essex Hemphill made significant contributions to the spirit of the conference. This year many of us felt a diminished presence of figures of their stature in the primary forums. We are committed to having a more visible and effective presence at future Out/Write conferences. This letter is an effort toward achieving that goal.

The African American Caucus would like to recognize the conference organizers' willingness to provide a space for the Caucus to meet.

The Caucus also acknowledges and appreciates the many hours of hard work it obviously took to make this conference possible.

The Caucus wishes to state that this statement has the support of the people of color who were in attendance at this conference.

\*The term "people of color" refers to people of African, Asian, Latino/Latina, Chicano/Chicana, and indigenous peoples of the Americas and Caribbean heritage.

*Submitted by Natalie Devora, member of the Ad-Hoc Caucus of Lesbians and Gays of African Descent.*

#### **Letters to Aché**

(continued from page 5)

a safe place to live. Help to get a domestic war veterans housing Proposition on the 1991 ballot.

Some of the present shelters are so terrifying and uncomfortable that some domestic war veterans choose to return to the battlefields of their batterers' quarters. How many foreign war veterans have to make this choice? The services defined in Proposition 134 should be offered as a matter of medical emergency now. If we are diligent about pressuring the state legislature, we may get a similar initiative to appear on the ballot in 1991.

Please, do all you can to bring the measures Proposition 134 proposed into law in this national emergency. Write to your state representatives to urge them to put these issues before the people again.

And this time have it include a domestic war veterans housing measure.

For further information contact:

Elisabeth Green  
584 Castro Street  
Suite 272  
San Francisco, CA 94114-2588

## Conference Report

### *I'm Out-Now What?*

by Ekua Omosupe

I attended the Fourth Annual Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum in L.A. February 14 -19. I was affirmed, excited, validated, proud and very visible there among my Black gay and lesbian brothers and sisters. I had a very strong sense of belonging and knowing that I was in the right place, that I am worthy of our pride, our pain and our commitment to political, social and personal growth. There were over 700 of us present from many diverse class and social backgrounds. Out and Proud.

The theme of this conference was "Come Out! Come Home!" The necessary work encoded in this slogan was not lost on any of us. Indeed, the purpose of the conference was to continue the processes of self-discovery, the discovery of each other, to "transform our silences into speech and action," our fears and frustrations into courage and hope, our misconceptions to understanding, to confront our fears and our doubts, as well as acknowledge the ways in which we are working to reconstruct ourselves in our own images rather than settle for those that have been imposed on us. We came together to "query the institutions" of racism, sexism, ageism, classism and homophobia. Too often we, I, have settled for what others have wanted for me. I have followed the rules and made every effort to be acceptable in the eyes of those who were powerful, or those who held the promise of power. This compliance and forced complacency left me invisible and

*A panel presentation  
by Ekua Omosupe at  
a UC Santa Cruz  
working conference.  
The panel was titled  
"Lesbian/Gay Studies:  
Querying the  
Institution."*

As I sit on this panel, again "Querying the Institution," I wonder which institutions we are querying: the academy, racism, sexism, homophobia, heterosexism, classism, or are we generalizing and universalizing so that we don't have to be specific, responsible? I also wonder what is the question or questions we are asking and to whom are they being asked? On the other side of this "querying" is the assertion, the saying out loud, if you will, that we are filling up the institution with queers. Queers: those who deviate from the norm or the expected, eccentric, strange, the marginalized. In a society where white supremacy establishes notions of normalcy and has made its assumptions tradition, politics, and a way of life, I, a Black woman, am already read as "queer," without making public the knowledge of my homosexuality. So, in the naming of us, gay and lesbians, as "queers" in this conference, I must ask who is naming who here and to what purpose? Who is excluded? For me, such a term assumes and erases too much, perhaps this is an insidious way of silencing.

I am Black  
 Dyke  
 Butch  
 Femme  
 mother  
 sister  
 cousin  
 girl friend  
 confidant  
 lover  
 born from a  
 girl  
 who taught me  
 how to be  
 woman  
 bitch  
 poet  
 sister  
 Dyke

Each of these names places me at precarious junctures and ruptures of identity—all of which are ambiguous at best—because these names that I name myself have already been used to mark me, and with that marking has also been imposed certain assumptions about who I am and what my politics are. I believe a name is complex and necessitates critical examination.

I have said, and I continue to say, that labels are restrictive; they are rooted in oppressive systems that are designed to harness, to maintain and perpetuate stereotypes, to prescribe lives to narrowness and ignorance, and to assure invisibility more often than to liberate. I think that it is the quality of the lives that we live that transcend the fixed categories that labels impose. For in striving towards living quality lives, we are pressed upon to examine the lives that we are living, to

become cognizant of the ways which we unwittingly participate in our own oppression. Audre Lorde has said in her essay "Poetry Is Not a Luxury":

*The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized...As we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny and to flourish within it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us. (Sister Outsider, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury," p. 36)*

The light which Lorde invokes involves intelligence about the contexts, social and political, in which we experience the dailiness of our lives. It means aggressive questioning and critical evaluation both personally and inter-personally and honest responses, even as we struggle to determine what honesty encompasses and what it can cost us. This is a painful process and it involves great risks, but what we have to gain, I think, outweighs what we think we might lose. Certainly, the enactment of this process is foremost on Black gay and lesbian political agendas. To "COME OUT," to declare publicly that I am a Black lesbian feminist, poet, single mother, 40 years old, and in the academic job market undoubtedly places me in a vulnerable position; it possibly threatens and delimits my opportunities to make a quality living for myself and for my children. Despite this, what I am and who I am becoming does not allow me to silence or to cut off any of my selves. I believe I have a responsibility to myself, to the movement, and to all who will benefit to live a quality life, which includes honesty. I cannot hide my Blackness, my womanness, nor do I choose to hide my lesbianism.

All of my life I have known that I am Black. With this knowing came a whole system of survival strategies that were

given to me by my parents, relatives, church, teachers and friends. For so long, the most important among them was silence. In this silence was my profound invisibility. While at the same time, because of my Blackness and my womanness I was most visible. This visibility had everything to do with the promise of my assumed heterosexuality and the stereotypes and exoticization of Black female sexual expression. This coupled with the fact that I am living and surviving despite racism (external and internal) has cast me as exceptionally strong, which is a burden in the face of my humanness. This tendency to exoticize me because of my Blackness and my differences doesn't lessen because of my lesbianism, I think, perhaps it becomes more complex and charged. This might be more clearly drawn in an academic setting and more intensified when coupled with homophobia. Often I am what Gloria Anzaldua calls "the object of the gaze" in *Borderlands*, "The Coatlicue State."

*The mirror is an ambivalent symbol. Not only does it reproduce images...it contains and absorbs them...There is another quality to the mirror and that is the act of seeing. Seeing and being seen. Subject and object, I and she. The eye pins down the object of its gaze, scrutinizes it, judges it. A glance can freeze us in place; it can "possess" us. It can erect a barrier against the world. But in a glance also lies awareness, knowledge. These seemingly contradictory aspects—the act of being seen, held immobilized by a glance, and "seeing through" an experience—are symbolized by the underground aspects of...the Coatlicue State. (*Borderlands*, p. 42)*

For some of my students what is "known" about me as a Black woman rests wholly in assumptions, assumptions that have come about due to their limited and

prescribed associations with Black women in their lives as "the maid who was part of the family," to surrogate mother, all of which are considered positive but limiting, nevertheless. When I disclose the fact that I am a sexual being and a lesbian there is some confusion and crisis and exoticizing of what I must be like. For some, I have fallen from a pedestal, no longer the paragon of strength and virtue and am often perceived as less valuable because I have made my non-traditional sexual orientation public knowledge. In other words, I have made myself human and a subject of their gaze, rather than allow myself to remain "frozen" in their assumptions and projections. And for others, I represent a promise of what is possible for them, who they can become: speaking subjects whose voices, ambitions, and vision gain validity. Still for others there is no exchange between "object" and "subject" positions, no learning, no dialogue takes place between us simply because they refuse to see me or be seen. Neither of us is the richer, despite my attempts to affirm my subjectivities. I am silenced and disregarded. They refuse to hear. My racial identity and my lesbian identity are collapsed into one and is read as aberrant, as threat, as exotic, as erasure.

So this evening I have difficulty labeling myself as "Queer" because of my commitment to visibility, to acknowledging my similarities, my differences, and my personal agenda: To be out, to be seen, to be heard, to establish a "home" wherever I find it. I "query" the conference: What is our purpose? What is our political agenda? What questions have we come to ask? If asked, will we seriously explore them or will they be forgotten as quickly as this morning's breakfast?

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## Round Brown and Beautiful

by Ntombi

### Health Editor's Bio:

*Imani P. Ajaniku is a lesbian of African American descent and her poetry and prose can be seen in several anthologies including Out of the Maze, and Women's Voices.*

As health editor for Aché, I bring fifteen years of experience and expertise as a health educator and lecturer.

My areas of specialization include: human sexuality, HIV disease, sexual assault, crime prevention, family planning, pre-natal instruction & labor counseling, domestic violence, holistic health, acupuncture, massage therapy, and couples counseling.

I see my role as health editor as an avenue to make pertinent information available within our community, which affects our emotional, physical and mental health.

Imani P. Ajaniku

*There once was a round brown woman who did not think her body beautiful...*

Growing up in America it made perfect sense that she did not love her body, after all, the messages she got were along the lines of blondes have more fun, and size 8 is the perfect size to be, and failing that, there is no life after size 16.

It was after a series of events that left her damn near devastated and with very little self-esteem. She clearly realized that it was crucial to her growth and her survival that she learn to love herself — all of her self.

She saw that when she did not love herself, she did not fully participate in her own life and she tended to become involved with people, places and activities that did not empower her.

*Oh, she knew she had a pretty face and she was kind and intelligent, but she did not think her body beautiful — after all, it had no long lean lines.*

The round brown woman decided to tackle the issue that had plagued her off and on for most of her adult life — her weight. She was a woman of size who had always been considered attractive by others. But what did she really feel about her body? She sadly discovered that she used clothes to camouflage her body.

*Then one day there came a woman who sketched with her hands how the round brown woman's hips reminded her of ocean rising and falling majestically and how the round brown woman reminded her of a mango with the promise of so much sweetness...*

So began a process of self-discovery, self-dialogue and self-acceptance and eventually self-love. Supported and loved by friends who could see her beauty when she could not, she chose to work on her relationship with her body. She began to watch herself as she moved. She began to deliberately and with reverence touch herself, stroking her own face, her own arms, her own thighs.

She began to look into the mirror telling herself, "I love you," wooing the image in the mirror as she would have wooed an abandoned lover. Over time she began to see a change in the eyes in



the mirror and then one day, after a storm of tears and an incredible amount of grief, she could see in her own eyes a willingness to believe.

Always drawn to rituals, she began to create her own personalized healing rituals. Knowing that it was on the emotional level that she needed to heal, she used rituals to evoke and transform her feelings. She used ritual as a way of acknowledging the sacred nature of her quest.

*Now the round brown woman had never thought of herself as a mango — maybe as a teddy bear all cuddly and cute or as an earthmother, comforting and calm, but never as a mango.*

The round brown woman watched as her perception of herself and her body changed; she watched in amusement and amazement as she began to love, to touch her skin, stretch marks and all. She watched herself become more willing to touch and be touched— but the most powerful moments were the ones spent with her own sweet self, smiling into mirrors with smiles that reached her eyes.

The round brown woman wrote a poem about being round and brown and beautiful and the poem turned into a workshop. That workshop was a joy-filled sharing with her round brown sisters and a journey into self-love.

*Now there is a round brown woman with honey lips smelling of ripe mangoes who moves through her life laughing.*

I am that round brown woman and it was my issues, my perceptions about my size that kept me from totally loving myself and living my life fully. I still have other issues, other areas in my life I need to heal. But what I want to share with you is that it is possible for us to heal and grow more beautiful than anything in our own eyes. I cannot think of anything more revolutionary than Black Lesbians Loving Themselves.

Everyone has their own path. Use whatever works, whether it be prayer or therapy, journal writing, or a group process. Give yourself the gift of love.

*Ntombi is a poet, performance artist and workshop facilitator who works towards creating a world where we love ourselves and each other.*

"Tell Mamma," a new addition to Aché, welcomes your questions concerning sexuality and relationships. Confidentiality guaranteed. Address your question to Mamma, c/o Aché, P.O. Box 6071, Albany, CA 94706.

## WinnSome Words

### SMART BOMBS = DUMB PEOPLE

**Lifestyle  
Editor's Bio:**  
Winn Gilmore loves fishing, women, words and the martial arts, though not necessarily in that order. She has been published in *Aché*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *Herotic II* (upcoming) *Riding Desire* (upcoming), and *Unholy Alliances*.

Now that all you Negro gay ladies have turned off CNN war-related coverage and come back to more physically close issues—let me take you back to some war realities not covered by our major media. Have you paid attention to the new nomenclature bred by this war to “free the Kuwaiti people?”

All this talk about Americans and allies drawing lines across which the Iraqis shouldn't cross reminded me of kiddy games: “If you love Sheila, cross this line,” the ringleader insisted to entice the shy, but ultimately willing, young girls in those all-girl parties. Now, the comparison stops there, because unlike the gung-ho warfolks, I changed: I outgrew the all-girl parties and conquest is a mutually agreed upon issue.

But the games these war-people play is still based on the mistaken premise that the game can win the war, when, in the end, it's only the “Right Way” that can win. What, you may ask, is this “Right Way?” Well, check this out.

I've been involved in martial arts (I guess y'all North Americans would call it war) since I was a pre-teen, and the first principle I learned was “At all times, I will try to actualize the true meaning of the Way.” The truth of this way is intricately tied into doing the right thing. I'm also a Christian lady, so I equate it with the

Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Now, I've grown up in this country, and the most immediate attempt at genocide was my aunts telling me that they carried me in their arms through some of Birmingham's mid-sixties riots. That, I believe, is close enough to first-hand memories of racio-cultural eradication. But now we have a fresh, bleeding-red account of what this country's goal is. Now, I'm a straight Negro lady, and I'm scared spitless, so I would imagine you Negro Gay ladies are scared shitless. But this is the message: trespass from the stated (and viciously so) plans of your affirmative-action-denying President and your unduly elected officials, and you're next.

They called Hussein “not a member of the same human race,” and they meant it just that way. But, he was our nigger in the war against Iran. Then, when he rose up against us, his master, he became totally dehumanized. It was just a slight slip from where the American power elite initially saw him to his now-perceived less-than-human state, but he is a colored person.

Remember that when they move to the next stage of premiering the new world order. That message to him, my friends, was a message to us. Their threat is not



## Loving and Hating Through War and Peace

by Denise G.

*Denise G. wishes to remain anonymous. She will soon move back to New York from San Francisco.*

I met Frida in 1987 through a mutual friend. She was a light-skinned (also called white-skinned) Puerto Rican who'd grown up in the United States of America. We had lots of things in common, and, initially, I was dubious about her claims of denying white-skinned privileges and insistence on being perceived as an Afro-Puerto Rican. So many devices are used to separate people of color, and I feared her claim of colored-identification was just an attempt at getting close to me. I thought she probably passed for white whenever convenient, which would definitely be when I wasn't around. How, then, could I be sure of how she identified? How, then, could I love her. Still, I was powerfully attracted to her.

Time passed and she proved, as far as I could tell and by the people with whom she chose to hang out, to be true. We moved into love. Still, I was uncomfortable when we were around white Americans unless we were speaking Spanish. I'm a light-skinned African American from New York, and many of my neighbors were Latinos, so my Spanish was passable. But, here in California, most people's perception of Latinos is tightly related to Mexicans, and Frida didn't look like a Mexican. So, even when we were in colored Lesbian—or even heterosexual—situations, she was misperceived as being white... unless we were speaking Spanish. So, speaking Spanish was a tool for proving that I hadn't really crossed over to the other side and started loving the skin color (and the self-hatred that implies) of the enemy. She was, after all, a self-identified colored lesbian from the Third World.

Truth be told, Frida was much more politically, emotionally, and spiritually colored than were most of my African-American lovers. One of the reasons African-American lesbians choose to be with other African-American lesbians is the unquestionable understanding born of similar experience: generally speaking, one African-American lesbian doesn't have to ask her lover who is also African-American what it feels like to experience her pain and joys. She understands, because she, too, feels them intrinsically.

Frida had white skin, but she never referred to her group as spics, and she certainly never referred to us as niggers; neither

internally nor spokedid she do this. Still, I was at war within myself. I loved her: the woman she was, was becoming, and dreamed of being. We were politically, sexually, and spiritually aligned. Still, I couldn't shake the color of her skin. She was beautiful to me, but I missed waking up to another brown (however relative that was) body. I longed to walk down the street with her, unequivocally two colored women together, without the questions of outsiders about why—and if—we were a colored and white woman together.

I travelled with Frida to her homeland, and I saw what I already knew before: her countryfolk were multi-colored, and many light-skinned ones, like Frida, identified with the African part of themselves and were actually proud of it. I was happy with her there, though another part of me, the lesbian, was consistently suppressed until we returned to the sanctuary of her family's home. I'd traded one oppression for another. Still, it was affirming to be with her in a place where she wasn't considered a gringo and I, a traitor/self-hater.

Still, we had to return home. That peculiar war-within-myself returned. She would be handed the bill automatically in restaurants, asked for directions, etc. How could I separate the all-present outside world from the woman I knew lived inside that white skin? How could I make love to the woman I loved more than anyone else and segregate her white skin from that of those I hated so passionately, both for their giving it so much virtue and for forcing me to equate it with hatred?

During the four years we were together, Frida realized my internal war, and we tried to deal with it...settle it, not like Americans hope to settle the Gulf War, but in a holistic, healthy way. It never happened, just as a true, peaceful Gulf War settlement won't. We still love each other. She still hurts because of the skin-hatred in me that prevented me from loving her fully. I'm moving soon, to continue my Ph.D. work and education. She'll stay in San Francisco. We both still love and hate, and the loving through the war continues. Still, we're not together anymore.

# ***They're Fighting For Me?***

by Winn Gilmore

Lest we forget, let us remind ourselves of a few official given reasons for the USA's momentous role in fighting the Gulf War:

1. To protect the American way of life and the American interests abroad;
2. To send an unequivocal message to the world that "naked aggression won't be tolerated (I guess it's a different issue if the aggression is clothed);
3. To free Kuwait.

Let's approach the first item first. The war-mongers spoke true when they advanced their aim to protecting the sanctimonious "American way of life." I have no doubt that members of the war camp feel threatened and angered by this country's diminishing world position. Furthermore, that Hussein, a little colored man who was formerly our lackey in the Iran-Iraq war, would defy America's orders was too much. Imagine how slave-owners must have felt the first time an ex-slave refused to do the master's bidding.

No, I'm not equating Hussein with newly-freed African Americans, rather, U.S. power and war-mongers recall belligerent former slave masters. Just as the Bourbon class (rich slave-owners) felt no compunction about seceding from the Union and going to war to protect their way of life (economic and psychological profit through attempted dehumanization via slavery), so these modern-day Americans feel no remorse for protecting their way of life. Indeed, former slavers and their allies saw it as their God-ordained responsibility to maintain slavery, their way of life, the status quo. Sound familiar?

Equality is one of the most lofty features of the "American way of life." According to this principle, all citizens have the right to equally enjoy: life, liberty and the pursuit of

happiness." Now, you needn't be a Ph.D. to recognize there's something wrong with this picture. If we're warring to support the American way of life, and equality is a part of this, why are colored folk so overrepresented in the military?

They feed us the lie that we should be happy the military has such an aggressive affirmative action policy. But we know it's because we're considered expendable. We also know that, not fervent patriotism, but the effects of racism (including poverty/unemployment and lack of education) are the reasons most so-called volunteers enlist. Read between the lines of "I joined up for the educational and travel opportunities" and you'll see "I'm too poor to get an education and to travel otherwise. The military was my only opportunity."

Another American-Way-of-Life hallmark is the right to the pursuit of happiness. It's almost obscene to use the space to argue that this right is applied selectively. Applied to the war and its fighters, they're supposedly all heterosexual. Let me just say that if the pursuit of happiness is a right, and if there's a right to love whomever you wish (with the other adult's consent, of course), then the military and government are wrong and lawless when they intimidate, prosecute, and expel Lesbians and gays from the military.

It's obvious that this "war campaign" is being waged to protect American interests, though. And let's face it: these interests have nothing to do with preserving or ensuring life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Instead, these interests are domination and money. The next time you hear the phrase "New World Order," think about what this really means. (By the way, Bush has vowed to veto the proposed Civil Rights Bill...again. He reaffirmed this in the

same breath as praising African American World War II fighters.)

OK, on to the second excuse for fighting: naked aggression won't be tolerated. Bush and his colleagues-in-crime have been quite forthright in heralding the dawn of the "new world order." This NWO dictates that no country tolerate another country's aggression toward another. Instead, an "international rule of law" will be applied to all would-be-despots (but only, I bet, if they venture outside their currently-defined borders. Hence, internally oppressive regimes such as those in South Africa, El Salvador, Israel, and the United States of America, will not be threatened). If this belatedly-born NWO had existed when this country raped Grenada, Nicaragua, and Panama, would the NWO have intervened on behalf of the countries we were invading?

The unequivocal message of the NWO is planned to put all fledgling Third World countries in their place (back in the fields, as it were, and out of Massa's house, where they've started thinking themselves powerful and capable of self-determination. Notice the post-war patriotic hysteria and you'll see that, beneath it all, these Americans can finally get it up again—their pride, of course.

"The giant," they're insisting, "was not dead, but merely slumbering. By gosh, we can do something right! Why, we may be over a decade behind in technology and light-years behind in our civil rights issues, but damn! we can make good, smart missiles and bombs!"

Well, I say, "Go ahead: smart bombs for dumb people."

Finally there's the issue of fighting to free Kuwait. The Kuwaiti royal family is non-too-respected and beloved by its poor

countrypeople, most other Arab countries, nor by non-Arab poor folk. Their reputation of filling government positions with controllable, extended family-members and filling their coffers with oil profits, are notorious.

Generally, Arab OPEC-member-states' philosophy is that the profits belong to the Arabs, as a whole, and not to one family or country. The Kuwaiti royalty have consistently departed from this practice.

So... if the USA government is—as they've insisted—freeing the Kuwaiti populace, into what are they delivering the newly emancipated people? Of course, it's to the status quo to which they're returning them, where women can't vote and are ruined by the mere suspicion of adultery. They're freeing the people to a government which has suspended, long suspended the Constitution, and where complete press censorship is the norm. Wow! Now, that's freeing a people, huh? If this is America's idea of dying and killing for someone's liberation, don't ask them to fight to free you! Not that they would, anyway.

Certainly, the returning American fighters who are Lesbian, gay, colored (and any combination of the above) won't be free. Members of the first two groups won't even be able to kiss their loved ones when they return. Imagine some sister running through an airport, duffle bag over her shoulder, while media cameras pop merrily. A grin spreads sunshine across her face, and she throws out her arms to greet her beloved. The camera zooms in and catches—gasp!—her throw a huge kiss onto her sister-lover's mouth. Think you'd see that "returning American hero warrior" on the television news that night?

Shit! Free Kuwait?! Free your own damned self, first.

## Poetry

### **E' KOO AH**

born on wednesday  
12 noon  
on a  
plantation  
in mississippi  
39 years ago  
to a  
15 year old girl  
who bore down  
on a birthing bed  
to bear a  
baby  
to raise a child  
and nurse a  
woman  
into loving  
her self  
©1991

Hello Aché readers. I am happy to meet you and am honored to be a part of the Aché staff. I live in Santa Cruz and teach courses in women's studies, literature, creative writing and writing. I am a single mother, poet, lesbian, Black woman who is committed to work in the community, visibility and declaring my right to be here. I am presently working on my dissertation: *The Politics of Constructing Black Lesbian Identity in the U.S.* I welcome any of your comments, letters, herstories, poems, essays, fiction that will help me to successfully complete this project. My work would not be possible if it were not for your presence. Thank you for being here and for being visible. I look forward to a year of productivity, learning and making new friends.

Thank You,

Ekua Omosupe

### **Untitled**

by Ekua Omosupe

My brother's face  
wasn't on the screen  
6 o'clock news  
but he is one of  
"our brave young men  
fighting for our country"  
running from  
crack  
running from  
"death at an early age"  
running to save his life  
dying to live  
on dry desert sands  
that sift  
his life away in minutes  
Kuwait  
your sand bleeds bodies  
my brothers  
lay cold underneath  
hot sun

## **Desert Storm**

by María Cora

"Fire next time" was the prediction  
Burning oil wells  
bursting into flowers of flame  
lighting ocean nights.

Missiles following others  
streaking across skies  
stripping away the safety of nightcover  
baring unfriendly fireworks  
high above the eyes of desert children.

Fear and prayers mingle within  
the cool tile walls of the mosque  
bodies toward Mecca  
figures bend  
and feel the earth shudder  
as bomb and forehead touch the ground.

Dust rises in the street  
as the feet of many hurry  
carrying that last precious bit  
of flour, oil, gasoline, milk  
home.

The arms and faces of love  
crowd around you  
safe for this brief moment.  
As you move quickly down the hallway,  
down the steps  
you catch a glimpse of her toy,  
your hand moves to it, for later,  
to tease from tears some sleep,  
to calm the terror in your daughter's eyes  
for the endless night full of death  
raining from the skies.

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# War Stories

by Dawn Lundy

As time becomes our enemy  
I know nothing  
less than sheer terror  
like a clapping in my ear.  
Louder than bombs  
on Iraq's bald head,  
my fear grows inexorably,  
a muted, horrible voice.  
I have never heard  
such deafening silence.

How many dusty black faces  
in the Saudi desert will be cut  
dry as wind blows sand  
into already collapsed souls?

As a veiled, hunched-over-woman  
is urged from crushed monuments  
by fiery gasoline fields,  
she walks a stolen highway  
discarding weighty possessions  
by the roadside.  
Her child lags safely behind.  
Even melancholy is gone.

We see the newsmen  
in blurbs on television,  
words floating from mechanical,  
deathly lips.  
They wage war on our bodies  
making them prisons  
and war on our people  
making them point rifles  
at their brothers' and sisters'  
gaping mouths.

How many lovers  
wrapped tightly,  
heads under blankets,  
shades heavily drawn?  
A whisper: Go away.

And in the night  
such deadly fireworks.  
The newsmen tell us  
"How beautiful!"  
as they crouch below bedsprings  
and hotel end-tables.  
Yes. How beautiful  
the cries of war.

amerika's leaders  
cannot bleed  
yet their faces are bloated  
with Panamanian women's fetuses  
and black Iraqi blood.

Their lands are soaked  
to the bone—  
like our Alabama.

Don't tell me again:  
The mother's are dying  
in their children's arms.

## **Untitled**

by Lambert Van Buuren

To the Blak\* people of  
Crossroads, South Africa.  
I heard your voices cry out,  
and the pain and anger  
grows like a hundred pounds  
on my chest.  
I cried to see a proud people  
stripped of their pride.  
Stripped of their culture and their  
land.

Rape!

Rape!

I cried

I roared  
I screamed  
I externalized the hate I  
feel for those who oppress  
and murder you!  
I collapsed to the ground  
helplessly  
sobbing.

\*the spelling of Blak represents a  
people's culture rather than a color.

*Lambert is a choreographer, educator and visual artist. She has dedicated her dance to sharing the experiences of African Americans throughout her multi-media presentations. She says, "To me, poetry is rhythm and motion. It is my way of dancing on paper." Through dancing and story-telling she has created many choreopoems—"Dialectical Rhythms, a mixture of verbal and non-verbal communication." Lambert currently teaches at Cabrillio College in Santa Cruz and looks forward to starting a cultural dance studio.*

## **To The Survivors**

by Nita

little girls with innocent eyes  
stare past large groping hands  
that filter unwanted pleasures  
press flesh where hairs have not yet grown

after reoccurring pain  
that swells the young mind and new bodies  
screams not heard lie wanting  
under volcanic pressure  
explosions foam from mouth and limbs

with tears they recount the story  
in riddles and with stuffed playthings  
the reality slaps doubting mouths  
of mothers, from their catatonic state

retreat to safer spaces  
darkened closets  
dulling of the senses  
the children harbor fears  
their natural curiosity shattered  
kind words cannot retake  
lost dreams and fairy tales  
time the healing enemy  
comes to rescue all who seek

the perpetrators covet young flesh  
abuse the words of love  
the masses demand the return  
of children's mangled spirits  
and empty souls are wanting  
with accounts left unpaid

## **Anger Turned Inward**

by Shakira  
(Kathleen Washington)

Images of death  
reflected in glass brown eyes  
mouthing words of  
anger turned inward  
come to surface  
as cold sweats  
between faded sheets

Death comes early for  
innocent brown people  
as young republicans rally  
around red, white, and blue  
and high powered lynch mobs walk on  
cold pavement and desert sand.

Staring down phallic shafts  
of hollow metal  
and Nintendo style warfare  
their claim to fame  
is freedom and liberation for all people  
while legalized death squads  
wage war on small  
children in Brazil

I do not know how to deal  
with this growing insanity  
as in-escapable weariness  
shadows  
coffee shop chats  
and speculating conversations  
about the "true" meaning of the war.  
I can no longer look at late  
night news or the cover  
of the evening post.  
It has become too painful  
too insanely real.

I have no words for what I feel  
only jerky tears  
of pain  
anger  
and disbelief  
trapped between faded sheets  
in a world  
gone mad.

*Shakira is a student at San Francisco State University where she is majoring in Urban Studies. She says, "I never thought of myself as a writer until recently. Putting my thoughts on paper has resulted in the recent poems that are published in Aché. I am in the process of deciding where to focus my energies in the struggle." She was recently published in San Francisco State's Urban Action.*

*Shakira works with Aché on the Outreach Committee.*

# Sister Hold On

Interview with Lillian Allen

by Paula Ross

## Co-Editors' Biographical Statements

A native of Detroit, MI, Paula Ross joins the Aché editorial committee as fiction editor and co-editor for Arts and Culture. She is the Coordinator for Allocations with the San Francisco Women's Foundation and was for five years Co-Director of Women's Voices Creative Writing Workshop, a residential program housed at UC Santa Cruz from 1977-1986. A former television news reporter, she is the editor of two anthologies, including *My Story's On! Ordinary Women/Extraordinary Lives* (Common Differences Press, 1985). Her work has appeared in *Conditions: Nine*, *IKON* and *Competition: A Feminist Taboo?* (The Feminist Press, 1987).

Amana J. Johnson — Artist, writer and craftswoman. Amana utilizes many artistic mediums for her expression, ranging from jewelry-making to her primary medium of stone sculpture. A native Californian, Amana now lives and works in Oakland and has been a contributing writer, talent scout and organizer for Aché since its inception. When asked about her fierce drive to create, Amana states "I am the infant in continual birth of myself. With open hands I receive trauma and delight simultaneously. Making a fist only shuts out the rich abundance of life's offerings. My art is the map that guides me, the tongue that speaks to me, the magic that facilitates my transformation. It is the elixir that heals and keeps me supple."

In celebration of International Women's Day, Jamaican dub poet, publisher and producer Lillian Allen brought her Revolutionary Tea Party Band to the Calvin Simmons Theatre on Saturday, March 9. A thoughtful, articulate and generous sister, Allen spoke from her Toronto home with editor Paula Ross a few weeks before her Oakland appearance. Following are some of the highlights from that interview.

*Aché:* How has living in a predominantly white culture shaped your life as a poet, as an artist, particularly coming from Jamaica where you were a member of the majority?

Lillian: (Laughter) Oooh! It's certainly a strange experience. I mean, every time I need a boost, I go, even for a few weeks, to where I'm a majority. [Living in Canada] made me realize how important it is to write, you know, I mean, you have this exclusion, particularly the way racism works in Canada, everything is swept under the carpet and there's no acknowledgment so you can't get any action, right? So if you want to read about anything, you can't find it in any standard way, in the school system, on the TV or anywhere, you know? So it made me realize that it was so important to create this alternate media, through my work, so that at least we have a place to consolidate our experiences and that we have something to pass on, you know?

*You've been described by a number of reviewers and critics as one of the leading practitioners of dub poetry. What does that kind of critical praise mean to you?*

(Laughter) Gee, I don't know! There are few leading practitioners. I mean, it's a very young art form. So I would say you're probably looking at 20 altogether, you know, people who sort of do it more than just a hobby. And you're probably looking at ten [for whom] it probably is the main artistic expression they put out. So it's not like out of a field of thousands or anything. But I'm proud to be spearheading the form, to be one of the major innovators, (I'd rather be called a major innovator) wanting to insure the form remains accountable to the politic of freedom, and [that] it continues to challenge any barriers or any form, any formalities.

*I'm not sure what you mean by that.*

Well, the form itself asserts new possibilities, the form of dub poetry itself. That is, given everything we know, everything we were told we would do or become, dub poetry wouldn't figure into that knowledge. And dub poets have managed to go somewhere way back and somewhere into the future and come up with something that asserts something different, something new, so my hope for the

form is that it continues to do that. And that it itself doesn't get constricted by even the form of dub. That it doesn't become a formula kind of thing, after a while that it becomes a politic, a politic with intentions, with revolutionary intentions.

*Dub poetry and rap seem to share a number of elements. At their core is the blend of music with sharply focused political and social commentary. They can both trace their roots to, among other influences, the African tradition of the griot, or storyteller. I'd also say that they share a primarily male point of view, which is interesting, since it was a Jamaican woman, Louise Bennett, who began writing poetry in the 1930s in the language that people actually spoke rather than the "proper English" of Jamaica's colonizers. What about that? Why do you think that dub became so male-identified or do you think it is?*

Okay, well, one thing I want to say about Louise Bennett. There were other people writing but she was one who believed in the Jamaican people, and believed that our lives were important and believed in dignity. So despite the scorn heaped on her and her exclusion from the literary domain of the time, she persisted and, you know, she went around the country with her words. And I think that's important, because there are a lot of people dabbling in writing, but it was more than just a writer in her, you know, it was the political aspect of it.

About rap and dub, yeah, I mean they share a lot. And the birth of rap itself, as we know it, can be traced directly to Jamaican d.j. d. jane, over funky rhythms and R&B rhythms. So, it's the same spectrum, it's a similar way that Black folks respond to the environment. If it's in Trinidad, then they'd be doing *rapso*, a kind of calypso dub, right? But I'm pretty sure that any part of the Black world you go now, you will find a form of dub and rap. I mean, we're now finding poets in Germany and South Africa. There are two prominent poets in South Africa who call themselves dub, one calls herself a praise poet and the other calls himself a dub poet. And it's the same thing, basically. It's people who have been involved in political

struggles and community organizing, so it's not writers as such, but people who use writing as a form of expression, as a tool, right?

How'd it get to be a male domain? (laughter). I don't know if it's fair to say dub poetry is a male domain. I think it's fair to say reggae is basically a bull pen! (laughter).

*How do you feel about the fact that you had to leave Jamaica, the place where you were born and grew up in order to find, I think you once said, "New worlds, new ways of thinking..."*

Pissed!

*...new ideas and new people."*

Pissed!

Pissed!

Pissed! Yeah, I mean, you know, when I was younger I was excited to do that, but every time I go back to Jamaica, it doesn't matter under what conditions, I keep telling myself I won't cry. But as soon as the plane starts to go down, I can't hold myself back. And every time I leave, I just can't hold myself back either. In a way, it's like leaving somebody you love, and you know you love and you know you'll never love anybody else as much but you can't live with them? And it's the most heart-wrenching thing. And I just hate it! I say, "Look at this beautiful country! Look at these beautiful people! And I have to leave!" I feel exiled, you know?

*Oh, yeah.*

(Silence for a few seconds.)

*I was in Toronto two years ago and heard a number of Canadian women talk about the almost colonial relationship between the U.S. and Canada. I was struck not so much by the level of resentment as the need to assert an independent, particularly Canadian identity. I expected that. What did surprise me, however, was how truly pervasive U.S. influence is. The bookstores and record stores, which is where I spent a lot of time, were filled with books and music by U.S. writers and musicians.*

Yeah, oh yeah. You should see the TV or listen to the radio. And there is a sort of resentment towards America, you know, particularly

among the more gentler people here and people who've escaped all kinds of things, all kinds of oppression and repression and economic hardship, you know? Because America seems always to be on the wrong side and always seemin to be the uncompromising Big Boy who's gonna make a point at all costs.

*Most writers aren't able to support themselves doing their art. Please give us all a thrill and say that you're one of the rare exceptions!*

Oh, I do! I do!

*You do!*

I do!

*That's great! That's wonderful! How long has that been possible for you?*

Hmmm, let me see...It's probably about five years now.

*So that's, let's see, five years would have been '86. So that's when Revolutionary Tea Party was released.*

Yeah, yeah, that's about the year, leading up to *Revolutionary Tea Party* and after.

*What projects are you working on now? Are you going to be releasing any new recordings?*

Yeah. Let me tell you a little bit about what I do. I don't just see myself as a writer or a poet and a performer. I also see an opportunity to make some intervention within the society, withinside [sic] of the cultural scheme of things. So I've got a record company. I own my record company [Verse to Vinyl] and I've started to produce other artists. I also have a music publishing company [Front Line Publishing] and a book publishing company [Well Versed].

*And are you able to employ other people?*

Yeah.

*That's really impressive. That's good to hear. So, you've produced your two recordings or are there more besides...?*

My two recordings and Clifton Joseph, who's another dub poet, and Mojah, who is a major reggae artist.

*Your poetry places a magnifying glass in front of*

*such issues as sexual abuse, racism, apartheid, and the destruction of the planet. You look at all these horrors without blinking. Yet you also talk about the abused little girl Nellie ["Nellie Bellie Swellie"] becoming a feminist and of the fire of the spirit of resistance in South Africa ["Freedom is Azania"]. What gives you hope? What is it that you believe in that makes it possible for you to keep on keepin' on?*

Well, you know, two things. One, it's the long line that I come from. When I think about what has gone on before, this great race that I belong to, ever since we were brought over here and made to work without money and under the most horrific conditions ever facing any group of people, we've risen up. And there are people who have struggled and fought and spent their entire lives, and some died, because they believed that my life is important and that I should live in dignity. And, you know, they don't even know who I am or where I live, but that was their belief. I mean, that certainly is all I need. And sometimes when I go to schools and I talk to young Black folks and they're on some kinda trip, I say, "You gotta wake up, man! If you don't believe in yourself, you *know* this: There are people who believed *on* you. And you better think about that. You are important. Your *life* is important. You have a right to live in dignity."

The other thing is, you know, when I work with people — that's why I always work in whatever community I'm in — there's humanity, that wholeness that comes from being human, that comes from being compassionate, that comes from making a mistake and changing and do it better the next time. That gives me a source of strength and a vision of the future.

*For a copy of Lillian Allen's record company catalogue, write: Verse to Vinyl/P.O. Box 311/Station E/Toronto/M6H 4E3.*

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# **Inner Spirit: Outer Vision**

## **Spotlight: Belinda Sullivan**

by DeOrr

The production of "Inner Spirit: Outer Vision" put on at Theatre Rhinoceros during the last week of January and first weekend of February was a sell-out success. The performers, Happy L. Hyder, Belinda Sullivan, Debra Floyd, Sharon Page-Ritchie, Karolyn van Putten, and lighting artist Stephanie Johnson, all combined their magical powers to create a passage to our own inner spirits through the sharing of their outer visions.

Happy opened the program and symbolically opened the theatre, our hearts and minds with a special smudge made of herbs unobtrusive to the delicate sensors of the environmentally sensitive. Sharon Page-Ritchie followed by teasing and tantalizing us through belly dance with the sensuous, voluptuousness of her beautiful body and hand movements. Sharon's dancing is always a gratifying celebration of the full roundness of women's bodies.

The flow of the show was an exciting, visionary stroll down a street with delightful store windows. Each window catches and holds your eye, visually teasing the iris before allowing you to continue to stroll. We come to Belinda Sullivan's novelty shop early. Her window display at first throws us off and we begin to walk past it, but before we know it she has woven a hypnotic web that draws us not to the window but through the threshold and into the shop. Once inside she unwraps the weavings of a tangled and familiar urban, American dilemma and shows us many individual threads to the overshadowed story of homelessness and societal alienation.

America 1990, an original story written and told by Belinda, speaks to the frailty of our self-contained worlds and tells us how that world, with such a simple formula, can be turned upside down. Belinda holds the crystal ball that shows us the selves who cast their eyes from the troublesome or distasteful image of homelessness; she cloaks our visions of the homeless in a jacket of illusion that speaks to

our unconscious and says, "This is not me...this could never happen to me!"

Belinda comes onto the stage like a surgeon, takes her instruments and slices away at the layers of delusion. She leaves us all very naked and vulnerable to the shocking reality that, yes, atrocities that would affect the foundation of our very existence could touch any of us at any time. These atrocities are swords that swing blindly.

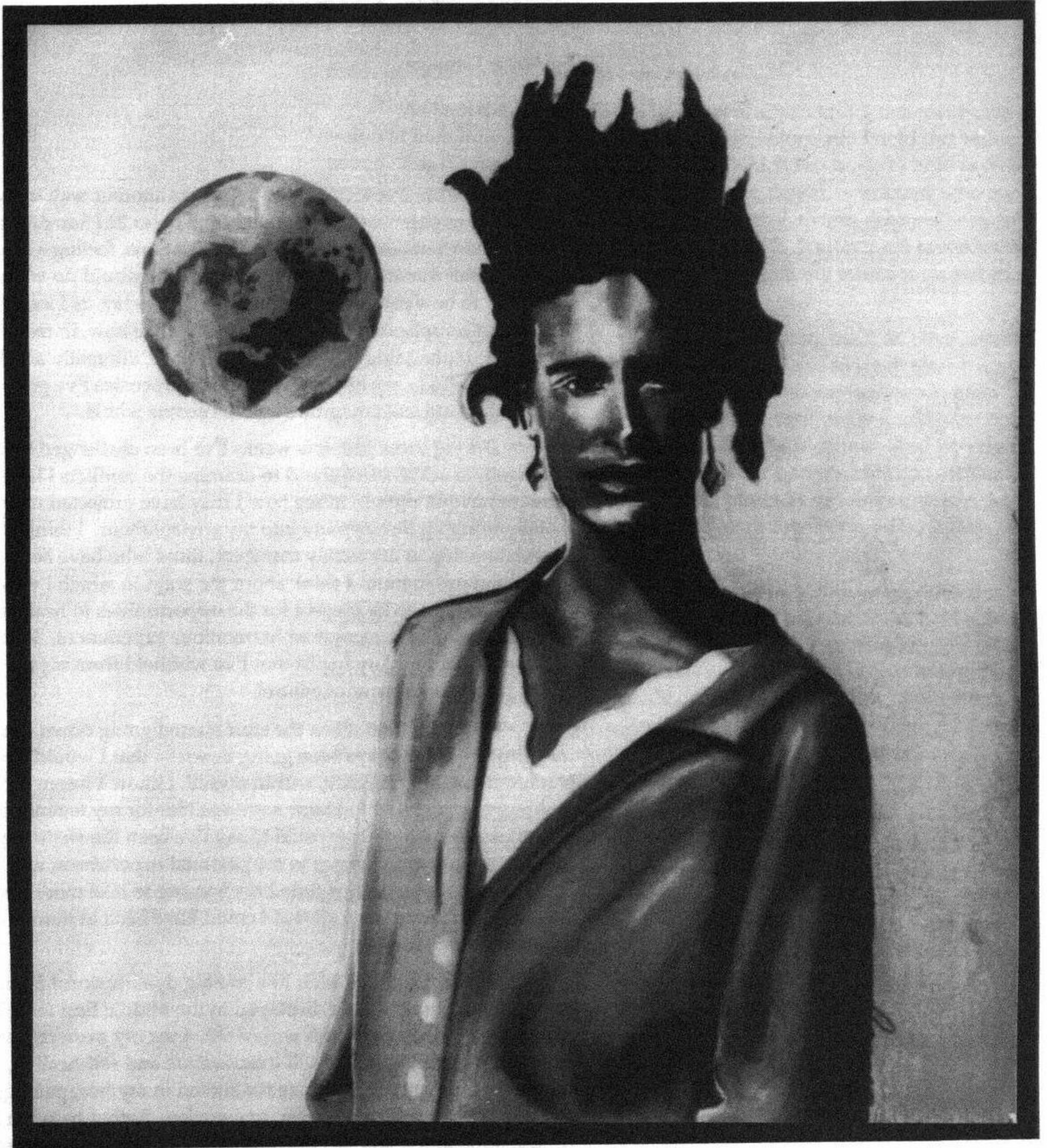
Psychic violence stands on the corner awaiting each of us. The societal taboo is in succumbing to the trauma. The punishment for breaking the taboo is a sentence into isolation through various institutions. Belinda's character comes from a mental institution where one further descends into the hellish experience of amputation from the self, AKA: madness.

Belinda took us on a tour of her shop, showing us the dynamics of our potential personal seasons — the spring of our supple and bending movements under inevitable pressure and the winter that makes us hard and bitterly dry. We see how our branches could snap like twigs — under the right amount of pressure.

Belinda's performance was full of gems as well as a bittersweet chocolate taste that she gives us to take home and savor.

*DeOrr - Performance artist, storyteller, satirist. DeOrr is a natural satirist whose work blends traditional folk tale, modern fiction and original material to address contemporary issues. Her zealous performance style appeals to the young audience transmitting important life lessons to them. The adult listener will appreciate her original and humorous material which leaves them with their own personal questions to answer. She takes stories from around the world and gives them her own special twist. She performs regularly throughout the Bay Area and is a member of Full Accord Ensemble...Arts At The Crossroad.*





## **What Do I See...?**

by Akiba Tiamaya

All of my life I've known that there was another way to live, a way rooted in peace and harmony. When I was 22 I *heard* for the first time an interpretation of the Book of Revelations, feeling a sense of truth in those words I took on the stance that I would do whatever I could *not* to be a part of the destruction. Yet today, as I look at my simple but complicated life, I've come to realize how, in many ways, the people in the Middle East fighting over oil, are really amplifying some dynamics in my life and the various processes I've gone through and am still going through to become whole.

During these past few weeks I've been challenged time and time again to acknowledge and re-examine the conflicts I have and have had within myself, to see how I may have projected them out, thereby bringing disharmony into my environment. I think about my relationship to my family members, those who have been my lovers, and my friends. I think about the ways in which I've sometimes chosen *not* to be present for the opportunities to heal and to heal from some of my less than harmonious experiences. I think of all the small but mighty truths that I've withheld from myself and others for my own sense of control.

I was sure that when the stuff started going down in this magnitude — it's always been going down — that I would have worked it out, but honestly, within myself, I know I haven't. So here I am wanting as usual to blame someone else for my feelings of powerlessness, wanting as usual to say I've been the victim again, just as I've done many times in my personal experiences, and while this reality is also true, this time I'm choosing to take more responsibility for not having been all that I could have been in numerous situations in my life.

To me this world feels like one big dysfunctional family and the family dynamics being displayed in the Middle East feel like a macrocosm of the microcosm within me. I see my main responsibility at this time being one of self-examination and self-healing, so that the truths I feel and act from are not rooted in my fear, pain, guilt, feelings of powerlessness, anger, or even joy. Rather based in love, the dynamic that holds this universe and all universes together. Not a conditional love, but love that is in total acceptance of all life and gives way to truth, a truth that challenges all fear because there is no

*I'm a city shaman  
womon, a healer, and  
a poet telling my  
stories and sharing  
my love every chance  
I get. And as a new  
member of the  
editorial staff of  
Ach , I am both  
excited and honored  
to be editor of the  
spiritual and healing  
section.*

room for those two elements to exist together.

As I am today, and always have been, approaching this reality, my vision of humanity, earth and sky are being transformed. I hold this vision sacred. It is the most sacred act I can make, which means that I hold myself and all my relations sacred. It allows me to see clearer — to know who my true allies are — to avoid my position of the judge, to take responsibility for my actions, thereby eliminating the need for guilt. It allows me to recognize myself as an *extremely* empowered being, as are all my relations on and in this planet.

In the AA programs they speak of "bottoming out." In other words, when a person is hell bound for destruction, they have to reach their bottom before they change their course. For some of us, this war will accomplish this. We may be forced to turn in to ourselves to see if there could have been anything at all that we could have done to change its course. And we might just stumble upon our internal conflicts with our parents, children, siblings, ex-lovers, friends, races, poverty...etc. Yet, others of us will continue to look outside of ourselves, looking for a place to place the blame, missing this golden "bottom."

As I listen to people speak on the war, many of us are speaking from a place of being inconvenienced. Inconvenienced because we're having to experience such an array of feelings. But it's a wonderful thing to feel; this is how we hear the voice of our SOUL. Living life, for me, means to experience and to experience I must feel. Of course, as we all know, this process can sometimes be extremely challenging, as so often many of our choices in life are made to avoid something rather than go...through something, thereby being present to transform it.

Perhaps if we each try and get clear as to what this war may be about from a personal perspective, if we can look to see if *we* have any of the dynamics of war within ourselves, then maybe through transforming our relationships to ourselves, we can see the road to transforming war on our planet. And beyond that, let us hold the vision that we have of peace and harmony for our individual selves for *all* our relations — the earth and *every* living thing. Aho!

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## Journal Entries

*It's been twenty years since I held you to my heart...you unable to speak of love — or anything else...me unable to speak of anything else but love...you quickly asleep, back turned to me, after making love — that's what I thought it was then...abandoned, enraged and long suffering, I left!*

*It's been twenty years and I thought I'd let it go...thought I could never love you again, but I saw you on the news last night...no, you were not one of the brave white fighter pilots with victory in their eyes...no, it was a quick flash, but I recognized you immediately...and they spoke of you in percentages — in the third person, as if you weren't really there.*

*Hand to hand in the desert sun...is this life our Jihad?...from the crack war to the gulf war...you are as lost to me as you ever were...from the Ghetto to the Gulf...I've lost you no matter where you are!*

### Honoré

*I am a performing artist, a healer, a singer from a long line of women who practice "laying on of hands."*

*War came on this spring-like January afternoon, creating a huge disturbance in my mind. The first bombs released such fire, smoke, destruction, mass rage and panic! I was compelled to shop for items I did not need, eat foods I did not want, and watch TV news for the pictures, the words I did not want to see or hear.*

*I am scared for myself, the people of the planet, and mother earth. How can I go to bed, get up, iron clothes, work, and chit-chat as in "business as usual?"*

*At the same time that the "Gulf crisis" is erupting, many of my internal crises are calming down. The healing that I'm experiencing in my life is coming through my process of seeing myself as more than an over-powered and helpless victim. Additionally, I am viewing the world and people around me as less threatening.*

*Damaged though I was by physical abuse and emotional degradation, my destiny has been to keep on pushing and living in the best way I know. Internally I've viewed myself negatively for most of my life, judging myself harshly and carrying a lot of guilt. I've held judgments and resentments towards others, as well. I know now that some of my ways of being were proper for the time and space in which they occurred, however, they were not healthy for me over a lifetime.*

*Seeing myself more completely*

*and accepting what I see as worthy, loveable ME is bringing me joy and personal peace. This place is new for me. I feel very fragile. The experience of war, death, rage, and destruction somehow feels very threatening to this very personal peace I have found.*

*I cannot separate geography — things that are not happening to me physically here and someone else's terror over there — from how I feel inside.*

*The only way that I can get back to my own peace is to take some power in this situation. The way that I'm doing this is by addressing comments that come out of denial, participating in street protests, and working diligently to teach peace in my school.*

*But my ultimate power comes as I embrace the knowledge that I reflect the universe — life based in love — then I can go forth with all the fuel I need to make PEACE!*

Lynn Scott

*I am growing by leaps and bounds, into a place where I am living/experiencing my visions and wanting to share the truth of my living with others. I am an evolutionary.*

# **Yearnings**

**(For all the children)**

by Shirley O. Steele

There are yearnings  
in this old body.  
There are wantings.  
A tightening of throat,  
A pull in the side,  
An ache in the long bone,  
A murmur in the heart.

There is a yearning.

There is a yearning  
to fly as a herring gull  
oblique to the sun.  
To run mustang free,  
wild thundering hooves  
Crumbling time into dust.  
There is a yearning.

A yearning.

To know that I'll live  
to see tomorrow.  
That my child and my grands  
And great grands will  
know tomorrows.  
To know that Time won't stop  
before it's time.

Burning, yearning.

There is a yearning  
That none, not yours nor mine  
shall blink and in an instant  
be hairless, blind, sterile, or dead.  
No once-living ash falling  
through the disappeared road.  
No mushroom suspended.  
Nor thermo nuclear seasons of death.

I am yearning.

For hunger's cessation,  
Abundances of roofs,  
Cures for the plagues,  
Salvation of Earth  
Peace in our lands  
Peace in our times  
Peace in our attitudes.

I yearn for peace.

To dig deep in the Earth,  
Impregnating Her belly with  
bare hands. Laying in seedlings,  
the saplings and fertile soil.  
Laying on the peat and the water.  
To feed all those who follow us.

Yearning.

To plant snow white tubers,  
Sweet water trapped deep  
for hibernation.  
Honey sap bulbs fit  
to hold our dreams  
in peaceful slumbering  
For 1000 years or more.

There is an urge  
to hide a sacred gourd  
for posterity.  
Containing:  
our collective wisdoms  
our myriad loves  
And the beauty, the beauty.

The photographs and  
the songs and the hymns  
The mantras, sage and  
the peace pipes.  
The crystals and the altars,  
Mandalas and all.

I'm yearning.

Let the children eat  
from our brains and our hearts.  
So that even to the 7th generation  
they will remember us.  
How we lived or didn't.  
How we loved or couldn't .  
Yet yearned for a natural state of mind.

There is a yearning, a yearning.  
For dirt beneath my nails  
From planting our lives deep  
In sun-dappled meadows  
Beside the clear waters  
In sheltered valleys.  
In peace. For the children.

*A New Yorker and former member of the original Gap Tooth  
Girlfriends, I'm now an urban shaman planting flowers,  
healing circles, and harmony on my small plot of land. This  
poem is 8 years old, yet felt more urgently than ever.*

# FREE DUMB DAYS

by Olosunde

I pass through the  
streets  
and wonder  
what it is  
my sisters and brothers  
of colour  
celebrate?

Do they dance  
to loosen  
cast iron shackles  
of an all but  
forgotten  
past?

Are the shouts  
of joy  
for the land  
our ancestors  
toiled  
but never owned?

FREE DUMB DAYS!

Maybe they're  
sharing  
wine, rhythm and swine  
in celebration of  
unemployment,  
welfare and  
homelessness.

Filled with  
pain  
and outrage,  
I watch them  
dance,  
sing,  
drink and nod  
between  
burning abandoned  
buildings.

To the click  
of handcuffs  
around my brother's  
wrists,  
I wonder  
why my sister's  
celebration  
has led her  
to stand  
in front of  
a moving bus  
with bent knees  
and closed eyes.

The sight  
of them  
saddens me,  
fear  
of what  
they do  
panics me,  
the sound  
of their  
celebration  
reminds me of  
gang wars, Viet nam  
and Soweto.  
Soweto, Soweto, Soweto!

FREE DUMB DAYS!

Back against the door,  
I wait  
for the scurry of  
mice and roaches  
to signal  
my brief freedom  
from  
burning buildings,  
busted hearts,  
overdoses and  
wounded children.

Only here  
can I allow  
tears of  
understanding  
to flow.

Only here  
can I admit  
that I too  
need  
liberation  
from Internal and External  
War.

FREE DUMB DAYS!

Desert Shield!  
Chemical Warfare!  
Desert Storm!  
Body Bags!

Again,  
the memories.  
Glass enclosed coffins.  
Sisters and Brothers  
of colour  
returning home  
jobless and shamed.  
Purple Hearts  
instead of  
Body parts!  
Infiltration  
My illusion  
of safety  
shattered.

FREE DUMB DAYS!

As the pain  
of living  
forces me  
to my knees,  
I call on  
the combined  
energy  
of the Goddesses  
asking them  
to help us  
LOVE  
ourselves and  
each other  
simultaneously.

The powerlessness  
rolls  
off my shoulders  
to patiently  
await  
sunrise.

Sisters and Brothers  
of colour  
while you share  
wine, rhythm  
and that sweet,  
red, swine  
I need to sleep.  
Briefly  
Be  
Independent  
of us ALL

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*I'm a New York  
sistah on a spiritual  
path, getting in touch  
with myself and the  
higher energies  
within the universe.*



## Fiction

### **Crazy from the Heat**

by Uzuri Amini

The following excerpt is taken from a book in progress. "Crazy from the Heat" is the first story in a short story collection about a group of nurses who volunteer to work in Africa.

*Editor's note: "Crazy from the Heat" was published in the Nov./Dec. issue of Aché. The introduction was inadvertently omitted, so the editors have decided to run Uzuri's excerpt again in full.*

Nia Imani is an African-American nurse working in Ijebu, Nigeria. Looking for an exciting challenge, she journeyed to Africa with twenty-four other nurses. Now after three weeks of being bombarded by the relentless broiling rays of the sun, and suffering from the lack of running water or a decent toilet, Nia decides to take a do-nothing day for herself. Sitting on a stool before the wood and dirt house where she lives, Nia's thoughts return to her first weeks in Africa.

...The University Hospital African Medical Mission followed their intense five-week training program in the U.S. with a three week orientation in Dakar, Senegal. Here the American nurses who could take the rigorous life were sorted out from the nurses who couldn't handle everything from the immense poverty to the subjugation of women the Muslim men put women through. The mission knew they needed the strongest and most resourceful nurses to fulfill their needs. Dakar was their proving ground.

Gradually, different nurses asked to be sent back to the states. Jean, the soft voiced nurse, was pick-pocketed the first day and lost all her confidence. Next to leave was Mary Ann, who refused to lower her eyes before a group of Muslim men and found herself set upon. Yet, the strangest case among them was Tina.

An African American, Tina was a carefree, generous woman upon arriving in

Dakar. Basking in her excitement at being in the Motherland for the first time, she discovered she could handle the poverty, the food, the pick-pockets, the veiled women and the Muslim men. But it was the group trip to Goree Island that proved her undoing.

Goree Island, reached by ferry, held personal history for Tina. Africans who were a part of the slave trade departed from Goree Island. It was their last image of their homeland. Tina found on Goree Island tortured spirits who wanted life and to speak to her. Within the walls of the old slave quarters, these spirits reached out and claimed Tina as their personal medium.

After her visit to the island, Tina could never rest for the spirits speaking to her. Constantly she heard the piercing wails of crying babies, the screams of the women, and the moaning of the men against the sound of the lapping ocean beneath the "Last Door."

The Last Door couched in the center of the slave holding quarters was the doorway through which the "new" slaves passed on their forever journey away from their Motherland. As the image of the Last Door lay embedded in her heart, Tina took it as a symbol of her existence in the world. Each day she thought of her ancestors who had passed through the door bringing her spirit into another world. And as the spirits spoke and touched Tina more and more every day, the more she was drawn to the rocks below the Last Door. Each spare moment she could find Tina spent sitting on the rocks, touching them, feeling and seeing the different personal stories of the people who had crossed those rocks with her fingers.

At the meeting where they were to receive their last instructions, before being sent to their assignments, Tina could not be found. She was not in the hotel nor in the small marketplace outside the hotel. Dividing into groups of twos and threes, the other nurses scoured the city looking for her. Yet, she could not be found. It was a restless night for all, worrying about Tina, her safety and her fate.

The next morning as they were eating breakfast, word came that Tina had been found. She was discovered sitting on the rocks below the Last Door engaged in a constant babble with no one. At least no one that anyone could physically see. They never found out when Tina crossed on the ferry, nor where she hid until the last ferry left. How long she sat on the rocks conversing with the spirits was never known. Nia heard the Senegalese whisper that the litany Tina repeated was actually the names of villages and people snatched from their homes and families hundreds of years before. Tina was taken back to the U.S....

Nia continues her reverie, looking at the changes working and living in Africa have wrought in her life. As the story progresses, Nia's memories of Tina become a foreshadowing of her own fate in Africa.

Nia sat on the stool before the wooden and dirt house in which she lived. Today she had decided to do nothing. She wasn't going to bathe, comb her hair, put on fresh clothes, nor stay in the artificial coolness of her room. No. Today Nia was surrendering to the relentless heat.

The village she lived in was in Nigeria, not far from Lagos. It was a part of Ijebu Remo, a place known for its mystical

power. It was because of this power that whenever Tina told Nigerians not from the area where she worked, movement was always away from her. Fearing that Nia didn't know what she had gotten herself into, other Nigerians would shake their heads saying, "Never marry anybody from Ijebu."

Nia laughed at the dire warnings thrown her way but found it much harder to find humor in the poverty that surrounded her. There was no plumbing system, so there was no running water, which meant no baths or showers and no sewer system, which meant no toilets.

The village, built on red dusty clay, baked 24 hours a day in a heat Nia had never experienced. By day, from the time the sun mounted the sky until it descended in the evening, the land, the animals, and the people were bombarded relentlessly by the broiling rays of the sun.

At night, in an effort to cool itself, the land released the heat of the day from its fiery depths offering little relief to the populace. Those who could afford them had fans, operating day and night, usually in their bedrooms. During the day everyone attempted to wear as little as possible and still be dressed and clean. But clean was a difficult thing to keep with the red clay dirt becoming airborne by the gaggles of children in various states of dress running, playing, arguing, and fighting in the dirt. The endless walking from one villager's home to another over the dirt under the hot sun did not help either.

Again she returned to the one thing that battered her spirit the most. The one item that she truly had no control over, the heartless heat. This heat smoldered with

more intensity than the Atlanta heat she remembered from her youth. This heat surrounded her with its suffocating humidity causing her to have sweat running down her forehead into her eyes, over her face like tears, while her sweat rushed down her chest and back like a personal shower. Many times Nia interrupted conversations with villagers to run into some private corner to make sure that it was sweat she felt running from her pubis down her thighs.

During the night Nia fought the urge to sleep naked on top of her sheets. Instead she slept between two sheets, afraid that a member of her host family would peek into her room or stumble in, as was their way.

From her arrival Nia found that this family and house was an open book to other members of the community, adults and children alike. After being there awhile, Nia decided the problem had something to do with the baba (father) of the family being some kind of big honcho in the area. When she questioned Dr. Owoldbi about it, his only reply was that her host had some big position in his religion. The end...close the book. And Nia's visits among the villagers shed little light on this situation.

As Nia sat on her small stool remembering and thinking, the sun moved higher and higher until it reached its throne position in the sky. Nia just sat, oblivious to everything.

"I wish that it would rain," Nia said to herself. "Yes, I wish that it would rain." Looking above the roofs of the village at the cloudless sky, Nia thought about the stories she'd heard here and there about how people made it rain.

Thinking out loud, Nia said, "Well, the technical way is to seed the clouds, whatever that is, but you need a plane for that and I don't have one. Um-m-m-m, and the Native Americans do rain dances. But I can't do that here. They already think I'm whacked. But, I could sing songs about rain. That's it! I'll sing every song I can think of about rain," she decided.

"Sunshine blue skies, please go away," Nia sang at the top of her voice as she launched into an old Temptations song of the 60's. When she couldn't remember any more words to that song she thought of another song and another and another. Nia thought her idea so important that she only left her stool to use her toilet and get water. One day of not eating wasn't going to hurt her, she thought, and kept singing.

Now the one thing Nia hadn't wanted was for the villagers to think she was crazy. Yet it was always remembered in the village that Miss Nia started being different that day she didn't eat and sat on Baba Light's stool and sang all those songs from her America. Most of the villagers spoke little or no English and to them it mattered little what Nia sang about. But the few who knew English and could understand her became concerned when they heard one word continuously from one song to another—rain.

They grew even more concerned when night came and Miss Nia was still singing. And after that day they watched her making her visits and listened as she sang about rain. The villagers began to wonder about Miss Nia because when she wasn't singing about rain she was talking about rain.

When was the last time the village got rain? Did it rain a long time? Was it cooler

when it rained? What places collected the most water when it rained? Did it by any chance flood in any part of the village when it rained? Would she still be able to make her visits without an umbrella when it rained? Soon the villagers began to wish that the rain would just come so they wouldn't have to answer any of Miss Nia's questions about rain.

For Nia, her desire for rain turned need turned obsession. Upon awakening every morning she checked the sky for clouds and every night as she fell asleep, she listened for the sound of raindrops on the tin roof above her room. And the rain didn't come.

Without being aware of it, Nia began every conversation with the question: looks like rain, doesn't it? Soon she found her obsession creeping into her dreams and fantasies. At night she began to fantasize that she was lying on the hot red clay ground naked with the rain falling from the sky.

Drop after drop, rain fell from the sky to caress her body. Rain fell upon her face kissing her eyes, skidded over her cheeks and nose, while forming a small pool in the crack of her lips, that overflowed and ran down her face and under her chin. There those raindrops collected with others at the base of her neck, curved around and down her chest. Her nipples tingled as the raindrops burst upon their upturned hot surface and created crazy patterns down her ribs to her navel. Each raindrop that fell into her navel splashed the former one out onto her belly to join its playmates.

Nia opened her legs wide to receive the cooling rain upon her hot honey pot, feeling the steam rise to evaporate in the air. Her legs trembled with the pleasure she re-

ceived from the rain as her toes opened and spread to accept this wet blessing. From there Nia drifted off into dreams filled with nature-made lakes of red clay filled with rain water. Here she swam freely as a water sprite free of the heat. In the morning she would awaken to the moist heat refreshed and still singing her rain songs.

Two weeks passed, another week, a month and still there was no rain. Now when Nia sang her songs, the villagers heard a dullness that was not there before. As Miss Nia made her visits and talked about rain, her eyes reflected only her frustration and despair of the heat. Soon all Miss Nia could or would talk about was rain.

Now for Nia her fantasies and dreams were where she was alive. Well. Sane. Her daily waking life was her nightmare. A nightmare defined and ordered by the heat.

And it was there in her fantasy lying upon the hot red clay dirt, the raindrops falling upon her body that she heard it. Tat. Tat. Tat. Tat. Tat.

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*Lizuri Amini is a writer, performer and artist living in the Bay Area.*

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## Features

# I WILL NOT FIGHT FOR YOU

**Interviews w/Valerie Brown, Mary Midgett,  
veterans of the United States Army**

by Natalie Devora

*"I would be there to support the troops..." V. Brown*

*"There would be no reward for me..." M. Midgett*

### Interview with Valerie Brown

*When did you serve in the military and with which branch did you serve?*

I enlisted in the army in August 1976, one year after the end of the Vietnam war. I was a part of the last group of women to go through the Women's Army Corps or WACS. I left the army in March 1980.

*What duties did you perform?*

I was trained as a Personnel Management Specialist or a highly-trained paper pusher. I would assign troops to various locations.

*What was your experience in the army as an African-American woman?  
As an African-American lesbian?*

The first four months were too busy for me to really think of anything other than what I was supposed to do next. When I received my first assignment, which was at Fort Sill, located in Lawton, Oklahoma, this changed. If you were Black you were assigned to one of the two all Black divisions: one being administrative and the other being combat — or, as we called them, gun bunnies and cannon cockers.

I went into the army so that I could have a steady income. I was ignorant to what war really meant and what its affects on me would be. At Fort Sill I saw how people were affected. Many of them were walking around with PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Many were alcoholics and drug addicts.

During this time, the army was attempting to clean up its image. The army conducted an experiment. They wanted to know how well women would function if assigned to an all-male field combat unit. I was one of four women, all Black, all outstanding in our classes, that was placed in a unit of 1300 men.

We were put in the unit because we'd all been labeled troublemakers. Each of us was put into an office where we could be observed by the officers who were all southern rednecks. There was a high degree of sexism. We all took an emotional beating. Our ages ranged from mid-twenties to early thirties. So we'd all had some life experience before coming into the army. Of the four, two of us were lesbians. We all stuck together primarily because we were all

I have had many feelings about the Middle East conflict ranging from anger to numbness. I learned that the first bomb had been dropped from the receptionist at work. I had spent the afternoon at the park. It was eerie walking through the office. I was able to hear radios tuned to several different stations. Everyone was trying to get whatever information that they could. I was in shock as were most of the people around me.

After the initial shock passed, I was made painfully aware of my, if it came down to it, mortality. I knew that as far as this country's president was concerned, I was expendable, my life inconsequential. I was angry at his callousness, his lack of concern for the lives of women, men, and innocent children in a land where his bombs were unwanted. I was afraid that my younger brother, a prime target for the draft, would be taken away from me.

I wanted to have a voice. I needed to find a way to express my feelings. Attending peace protests was not a viable option for me. Being legally blind, makes me feel too vulnerable to be in a crowd of hundreds or thousands. The following interviews emerged from that need to express.

— Natalie Devora

*Natalie Devora joins Aché as the Features and Special Projects editor. She is an Albino lesbian of African descent. Her work has appeared in Sinister Wisdom as well as Aché. She will be published in the upcoming book Riding Desire, edited by Tee A. Corinne, to be released in June. She has also performed with Mothertongue Readers Theatre.*

afraid. The officers attempted to separate us more than once but they weren't successful.

It was during this period that I became a vegetarian, pierced my nose, shaved my head, and began practicing Eastern religion in order to survive.

My superiors were so furious that they made me buy and wear a wig while in uniform. The alternative was a court martial. I had broken the Uniform Code of Military Justice which states that one will not willingly destroy military or government property and that women's hair would not be so short that it gave a masculine appearance.

*What are your views about the Persian Gulf war, Valerie?*

It's a sad state of affairs. What is really hurtful is that soldiers who survive won't have veteran support because we (the Veterans Administration) are broke, thanks to Reagan. There will be very few services or benefits for anyone. The veterans hospital is \$30 billion in debt. Doctors here won't be trained to treat the injuries sustained in the Middle East. There will be no housing. The majority of those on the frontlines are people of color who will suffer the most. For many, being in the military was/is their only hope at having stable consistent income to take them into retirement. With their legs gone and their brains damaged due to chemical warfare and nowhere to put them, these women and men will become another branch or subclass of homeless people.

White America has a lesson to learn. You can't keep fucking with people of color and not be affected. You can't go into other cultures and expect to wave your fist and say, 'I don't like what you're doing. My bombs are bigger and better than yours and I'm going to show you how I use them...' and expect respect. America is being set up for a fall that I don't think it can recover from. You can't fight aggression with

violence. It doesn't work. Fighting aggression is like fucking for celibacy.

We need to look at the problems we have here in our own front and backyard, homelessness, educating and feeding our children because they will be left carrying the stigma of this war with no resources nor hope for the future. No one is considering the aftermath.

*If you were called would you go to the Gulf? Why?*

I would go to the Gulf but not in a fighting capacity. I would be there as support to the troops who can't handle the killing and the maiming.

*Have you gone to any peace protests?*

No. I empathize as well as sympathize, but I don't do crowds due to my disability. I do support our troops. I do not support our President. The troops are people, human beings with hearts and feelings.

*What is your disability?*

I have what is called Transverse Myelitis, a neuromuscular degeneration due to an accident while in the army.

*What would you say that African-American women and men have to look forward to upon returning from the Gulf?*

Disillusionment is the first thing that comes to mind. I think that they'll be lost in the shuffle and that, as usual, the white boy will be the hero. I fear that one, people of color won't be recognized, and two, many will suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and alcoholism. In essence, we will have been used, abused and forgotten.

*Interview with Mary Midgett*

*When did you enter the military and which branch did you serve?*

I joined the Army at age 19 on Valentine's Day 1956 for a two year enlistment. I reenlisted in 1958 because I wanted to go to Europe. I was stationed in Frankfurt, Germany. I left the Army in 1959 willingly

because I fell in love with a woman. I received an honorable discharge — even though I openly called myself a homosexual.

*What duties did you perform?*

I was a bookkeeper.

*What was your experience in the military as an African-American woman? As an African-American lesbian?*

Overall I had a good experience in the army. It was peace time. It was outside the base where I encountered problems. I was stationed in Fort McClellan, Alabama. Anniston, Alabama, was a small town right outside the base. That was where I was subject to racism.

*What are your views on the Persian Gulf War?*

I am very angry. I am angry because Bush is unwilling to negotiate for peace. Perhaps he is trying to do something to make the history books. He is directly endangering millions of lives as well as destroying lives. I have a son who is of military age and therefore that affects me as well.

Last October I had reason to be at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland, CA. In the two weeks I was there I saw 10 women, all nurses, get their orders to go to the Gulf. Of those 10, three were Black women. The women were all angry. Angry because they had to leave their families, their children.

*If you were called would you go to the Gulf? Why?*

No, I wouldn't go. There would be no

reward for me if I served in a war. Although I know that this country is a free one despite racism and unemployment, I can still walk down the street. Compared to other countries where people live under dictatorships with guns to their heads and where the quality of life can change overnight, I have freedom. I would not leave this country and yet I will not fight for it either.

*What would you say that African-American people currently in the military have to look forward to upon returning from this war?*

The women and men that do come back will be psychologically devastated. Primarily because most of the men are young. They will all be ostracized, but not by their own choosing. There will be a huge backlash from the masses because people are angry. People really didn't want this war.

*Mary Midgett was born and raised in Boston, MA, and later was transplanted to San Francisco. She is an educator, as well as a popular speaker and writer throughout the country. Midgett is the author of Brown on Brown: African-American Lesbian Erotica.*

*Valerie Brown is a 35-year-old African-American lesbian residing in San Francisco. A professional musician, she is currently working as a coach for wheelchair sports. Valerie is the team captain of the women's wheelchair basketball team, the Bay Area Meteorites.*

## **Women Resisters**

**An Interview with Conscientious Objectors, Azania Howse and Farcia DeToles**

by Paula Ross

As women of color, we have too often been caught in the crossfire between strong allegiance to and identification with our communities of origin, our African roots, and our beliefs as women in the right to control our own lives. This issue of *Aché* continues a conversation with Azania Howse and Farcia DeToles, two African American reservists and conscientious objectors who refuse to give up any part of who they are, either as African Americans or as women. This conversation occurred in Azania's home on February 6, 1991, with editor Paula Ross. Sections originally appeared in the March, 1991, issue of *Crossroads* (P.O. Box 2809, Oakland, CA 94609).

*As African-American people, why should we be concerned about this war?*

**Azania Howse**

Well, we should be very concerned as African Americans because most African Americans and poor people, Latinos and Asians — all people of color — usually join because we don't have money and we join the Army because we need jobs. There are no jobs out here for people. A lot of single mothers are joining and giving custody of their children to their mothers or relatives because that's how bad they need to work. It's a survival thing in poor communities. And it's not because we necessarily believe in what the military stands for, but people are desperate and people need...people of color are survivors. I mean we have been, that's why we're still here. And that's why we join the military—to survive.

*What do you tell a young Black woman or young Black man who sees the military as the only way to get an education or acquire job training?*

And so many do, that's the sad part. Well, you know there are alternatives. There are grants and loans and things that people don't know about and their counselors at school do not tell them about, maybe because they don't know about it either. But you know, you just have to go to the library and do research and just maybe ask everyone you know and try to network, go to the colleges and talk to counselors, and just talk till you're blue, or blacker, in the face. But I would say definitely not to join the military unless you believe in this system and you want to be a killer. If you don't want to be a killer, I would say do not join the military because that's what it is — it's an institution that bears arms for the purpose of killing.

*Some people might look at the choices that each of you made, you Farcia when you were 18 and you Azania when you were 33 and say, "You made this particular choice, you made a contract, and now you want to go back on the contract."*

We don't want to go back on the contract, we want to litigate the contract. It's within our moral right to seek discharges if in fact we decide our moral beliefs don't coincide with the military. And so we have every right to obtain a lawyer or go through the necessary avenues to be released from the military. We're not doing anything illegal—the military invented conscientious objection for people like us who seek discharges. So we're going about it the



right way.

*So how do you respond, Farcia, to someone saying that you as an individual or Black people in this country, are not patriotic?*

**Farcia DeToles**

You have to be patriotic to what you feel is right. This country—if they claim being patriotic is to support killing, I cannot be patriotic to that. I am patriotic to humanity and I'm patriotic to the world. I feel that I have a duty as a human being to try and live and let others live. I don't think I have the right to take anyone's life intentionally and no one has the right to do that to me. That's my patriotism—to the world and to everybody. If we're not patriotic, you certainly couldn't tell it by the numbers that are in Saudi Arabia giving their lives right now, the numbers of American Black people in Saudi Arabia dying for the American way of life, or oil.

*Azania, you mentioned a few minutes ago that the avenues that you're pursuing in terms of conscientious objector status is a category the military itself created for people like you. Did you know anything about the c.o. designation either before you joined the reserves or even after you joined the reserves?*

**Azania**

No. Farcia and I found out about the same time. A friend of ours told us, a recruiter. We were just seeking a discharge from the military. We hadn't even heard about Jeff Patterson, the first conscientious objector, I think...

*You mean for this war?*

Yeah, for the Persian Gulf crisis, right. Yeah, we didn't even know anything about it. We knew that we didn't believe in the institution of the military, and both of us had bad experiences. From the moment we joined the military we've hated it. Both of us have been seeking ways to get out almost since we joined, but most people keep it very secretive. And when we tried

to get out, people would say, "There's no way out, you can't get out, you just have to serve your time." So a friend of ours told us about conscientious objection and he suggested that we get the regulation and read it and if it applied to us to follow it. So we did.

*You don't usually hear about women who are already in the military actively resisting. What issues do you see that are different for you as women or for other women who might decide to resist?*

A lot of people believe that women shouldn't belong to the military in the first place because women are, I guess, lesser fighters than men, or not comparable to men — that's not the word I want, I can't think quite the concept I'm trying to say — it's kind of the feminist issue of whether women should belong in the military, I guess.

*So if they're going to have equal rights they should have equal...*

Exactly. Right. And I know that in a press conference one woman asked, "Do you think you'll be hurting the women's movement by doing this, by not wanting to fight alongside the men or not wanting to go to war?" And I just said, "Well, I can't be concerned about that right now, I just have to follow my conscience. And my conscience tells me that I'm not a killer and that I will not be able to kill anywhere in the Middle East or here or anywhere else. And then Angela Davis was there and she said something really brilliant that I had never thought about, she said that "Women don't want to be equal in the right to kill — that's not one of the issues in the feminist movement." And I said, "Go ahead, Angela, you tell 'em!" (laughter)

*Are you still participating in your reserve units' activities?*

We're still attending our drills. We thought about never going again but our lawyer told us that wouldn't be a good idea. When we wear that uniform, I mean it's very

depressing to wear the uniform with what we believe. We know that people are in the Persian Gulf killing people with that uniform on. We don't want to be associated with that group.

A lot of people are going. I find a lot of patriotism from African-Americans in spite of the way the country views us and treats us and will not give us human rights and will not give us a civil rights bill, and you know, we have all these drugs in our community. Nobody cares about that. And we have low employment, high drop-out rate of high school. No one care — the government does not care about those things.

*And how do you explain, then, the fact that so many African Americans do join the military and support what's going on in the Persian Gulf?*

African Americans, they're amazing to me, just amazing. We have been supporting this country and trying to be an equal part of this country and trying to be accepted since we got here, for 400 years, and it's still not working. The system does not work for Africans in this country. It just doesn't. And I don't think it ever will. I think the only way for the system to work for Africans is that it be changed to a new system. But as it stands now, racism in the capitalist system will always be able to just run rampant. I mean it seems that everything that Martin Luther King did in the '60s has been reversed. All but voting. And I don't know what good that does because it seems like even when we vote we still don't get the people that we vote for in office. So I don't even really trust the vote. People who control the voting control who goes into office. And I think they let a few Blacks slip by, just for tokenism. A brother like Malcolm X could never get into office, not that he'd ever have run, but, you know, some kind of revolutionary person would never make it, so you have to agree with the system, just like Colin Powell, who is a disgrace to our race, a total sellout.

*What's the one thing that you feel you would like other African-American women to know about your experience? What has it been like for you?*

**Farcia**

I would say one thing I would want them to know, as women — it's a difficult process for us because it's very stressful, but know that you are not alone, even though you do feel that you're alone. Azania and I, we felt very alone at first, just me and her, it's very good though that we had each other, I know that I'm glad that she's helping me and I'm helping her. But there is sisterhood out there, because there's a lot of women, just like the Women's Building, that support us, and the Emergency Committee to Stop the War, Gloria LaRiva, she supports us, and the...

*The Women's Foundation and Angela Davis, there have been so many women who have been so great to us.*

**Azania**

I would like all the African-American women to know that we appreciate all the help that we've been receiving from women in the African-American community, because we have. And I would say, I would like to see more African-American women get an education. And especially know who they are, and what they mean to this system which is really important because the obvious is not so obvious. To some people they can see the racism but to a lot of people racism is very subtle, and they don't know the part that they play in society. I think that the African-American woman is the lowest on the class scale in the U.S. and that we are the victim of a lot of injustices and that I think I would encourage African women to definitely take Black Studies classes. It's just so important that we know where we are and where we stand in this society.

## Bulletin Board

### GROUPS

GROUP FOR LATINA LESBIANS, 12 weeks, Thursdays, 5:30-7:00 pm. Sliding fee scale. For more info, call Micaela Lovett at Operation Concern, 626-7000.

For Afro-American women who are interested in exploring and healing the effects of our internalized oppression/violence, I am forming a group. Anyone interested, please contact Akiba at 704-8410.

The dreams of our spirit-self are calling to us to become a part of our awakened life... If you hear the whisper please join us. New facilitated group forming, the inexperienced welcome. For more information call 849-2416.

Support group for Black Lesbians in multicultural relationships meets the 1st Sunday of each month in Oakland. For info: 839-3302 or 653-5732.

Black Lesbians exploring the issue of fear in our lives, and how it separates us. Group meets weekly on Friday evenings. 3-month commitment required. For info call Joyce at 839-3302 or Takal at 346-5872.

LESBIAN OF COLOR SUPPORT GROUP every Thursday evening from 6:30 - 8pm at the Pacific Center, 2712 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley.

MUJERIO, the bay area Latina Lesbian organization, holds monthly meetings on the 3rd Saturday of each month, 5pm. All Latina Lesbians welcome. Info: 587-7384.

Multi-cultural Lesbian writers group forming. For more information call 995-2730.

First-time group for lesbian survivors of incest and childhood

molestation. Members must be in individual therapy simultaneously. 16 weeks. Mondays 1:30-3pm. Sliding scale. For more information call Alesia Kunz at Operation Concern, 626-7000.

### JOB ANNOUNCEMENTS

COORDINATOR for Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Speakers' Bureau. 1/2 time facilitating program of volunteer speakers. Open immediately. People of color encouraged to apply. EOE. (415) 548-8283 M-F 10-10.

Feminist Bookstore News has one opening for a three-quarter time Office Manager and Production Coordinator. Responsibilities include routine office work, office management, ad tracking and billing, layout and production for an 125 page bi-monthly trade magazine. For more information or to apply send resume and a business letter (or other sample of your writing) to: Carol Seajoy, Feminist Bookstore News, 456 - 14th St. #6, San Francisco, CA. 94103

### NOTICES

CONGRATULATIONS OAKLAND! Host city for the 1992 Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Conference in February. The organizing group is looking for volunteers! To volunteer or to get more information, call one of the co-chairs: Tolanda McKinney (916) 429-6208, or Anthony Farmer (415) 824-3387, or contact Skye Ward of the Aché Outreach Committee 643-7143 (8 am to 5pm, M-F).

The 4th Annual Lesbian Separatist Conference and Gathering will be held in south central Wisconsin, August 29-September 2, 1991. Play, talk, argue, spark new friendships, renew old connections, and have fun for a change! Sliding scale registration fee: \$110-175 (scholarships available, write for information.) For more information, contact: Burning Bush, P. O. Box 3065, Madison, WI 53704-0065.

SPRING IN BOSTON! An opportunity to take out your favorite couple with a five no and a trip to Boston. BID WHIST Tournament. Saturday, May 4 at 7 pm. 4768 Belfast Ave., Oakland. \$100 Grand Prize \$20 per couple to register, includes Bar-b-que plate. If interested in participating, you may register by sending in your \$20 to the Nia Collective, P.O. Box 20835, Oakland, CA 94620. Registration deadline is April 26. For more information, phone 658-7737. \$6 admission for observers, includes Bar-b-que plate.

Black Lesbians 40+ interested in forming a once a month social group for pot luck dinners, theater outings, card and board games parties please contact Brenda at (415) 465-2573.

The First Northern California Conference on African-American Women and HIV will be held on May 4th, 1991, at San Francisco State University. Registration for the one-day conference will begin at 8AM. For more information contact the Black Coalition on AIDS at (415) 553-8197.

SAPPHIRE THEATRE CO. announces an acting workshop for beginners & experienced. Workshops are ongoing. \$5 each workshop. For more information call 653-4945.

Women-identified women with locks for interviews. I'm a photographer (with locks) interested in doing a documentary. Gents, 655-0545.

Are you a disabled woman who likes to perform? Come join "Why Crips" - Disabled Women's Theatre Arts Project. We do readers theater, skits, songs, etc. Come share your creativity. Give us a call today at (415) 601-5819.

Donate your paperback books to women in jail!! Especially in demand is poetry, lesbian erotica & fiction, and books by and about people of color. To donate materials contact Amy or Catherine at Alameda County

Library Extension Services. (415) 745-1477.

### SERVICES

Cheap and Reliable Moving and Hauling call (415) 638-3106.

ASTROLOGICAL SERVICES Gain insight to your personality and relationships thru astrology. Services include FREE telephone follow-up. Call now, 24 hours a day (415) 874-4726.

Sandra Lebbby, MSW, is pleased to announce the opening of her private practice of Psychotherapy. "I am a black woman interested in working with clients of color." Sliding scale. (415) 534-5006.

CHIROPRACTIC FOR THE NEW AGE - directional non-force technique provides deep-level healing and lasting correction in minimal time. Honor yourself with my Optimal Wellness Program. Call or write for a brochure/ information. Francesca A. Jackson, D.C. 5349 College Ave., Oakland, CA. 94618. (415) 653-6029

COUNSELING FOR WOMEN "Let's break the bonds of the emotions of oppression and fly with the sun in our hearts" Simbwala, 465-3933

SUPER FUN KIDSITTING Creative childcare specially tailored to meet your child's personality. Sports, arts and crafts or adventures. Occasional sitting ONLY. Take a break this weekend and leave your kids to us. (Oakland & Berkeley.) Heather, 832-4753.

Is your daycare provider understanding of your special family? Daycare by Stephanie, a developmental program for children. 8 wks. to school age. 7am to 6pm. Mon-Fri. O.M.I. area, SF. For info, call 334-2077.

Creative Murals & Trims Children's rooms, kitchen, and bathrooms. Professional.

experienced designer. Montez, 832-4753.

Fashions Management & Consultant Services  
Deborah Matthews  
(415) 841-2672

"A SAFE & CARING MASSAGE"  
by Debra K. Floyd for yourself or a friend. An hour treatment (\$35) consists of a full body massage, grounding, relaxation breathing and ends with a warm wrap. Call 548-2143 for an appointment.

**THERAPIST AVAILABLE**  
Supportive counseling including cross-cultural, sexual abuse, and substance abuse issues for individuals and couples. Sliding scale. J. Segal, MFCC Lic. # MX0 2357. (415) 985-7157.

**GWEN AVERY FOR HAIR**  
Precision haircuts, styles, colors and perms. 550-7666.

Dancing Lady who is very interested in keeping her strip tease skills honed, is available for your next special event. If you're having a party or even a smaller more intimate occasion—let me entertain you! Fee negotiable. For info, call Teri, 532-8836.

#### **SUBMISSIONS WANTED**

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS to Anthology on Lesbian and Gay Marriage. Interviewing couples who've had a public commitment ceremony; couples who don't believe in lesbian/gay wedded marriage; individuals who would like to write a critical piece. Contact Suzanne Sherman, (415) 267-5606 or 530-7559.

Aché is looking for works of fiction by lesbians of African descent for consideration in upcoming issues. We are interested in all fictional forms and particularly welcome experimental approaches. Work should be a maximum of 1500 words, typed, double-spaced or neatly hand-written. Macintosh disks, (Microsoft Word), are also acceptable. Please include an

SASE with sufficient postage if you'd like your manuscript and/or disk returned to you. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a brief biographical statement of no more than 45 words. Send submissions to: Paula Ross, Fiction Editor, Ache, P.O. Box

The **Conditions Collective** is accepting submissions for an anthology of new writing by women on the topic of women and censorship to be published by **Cleis Press**. The Collective will consider fiction, poetry, analytical essays, novel excerpts, and translations on this topic. How does censorship relate to the issues of, for example, race, class, age, relationships, sexuality, women in prison, women with AIDS/HIV, and women's and lesbian movements? The writings could also explore the ramifications of censorship on future writing; the ways that women censor one another and themselves; or the homophobic hysteria over gay and lesbian writing and visual images. B/W photographs and other visuals will also be considered. The **Conditions Collective** welcomes the work of women all around the world who feel that a commitment to women is an integral part of their lives. Please send submissions before **June 1, 1991**, (typed, double-spaced, up to 15 pages, with an SASE for return) to: **Conditions**, P. O. Box 1640, Cooper Station, New York, NY 10003. The **Conditions Editorial Collective**: Cheryl Clarke (201) 798-4255; Paula Martinac; Deborah Cox; Mariana Romo-Carmona (212) 316-2217

#### **SHARED SPACE WANTED**

Artist seeking flat mate to share living space in North Oakland two blocks from the MacArthur Bart station, near bus lines. Prefer working artist. \$375 plus utilities. First, last and deposit negotiable. Pleasant living environment, intense creative energy. For inquiries please call 654-6592 and leave message. Space available in mid-June or sooner. Must be

financially reliable.

#### **HEALING HELP WANTED**

**When I am healed I am not healed alone.** I, Aisha, have been afflicted with a decubitus on the coxix area—the tailbone, sometimes referred to as the kundalini—which has been six inches in depth, and is now three inches deep. The wound needs to be kept clean. This is done by bathing, which I do for myself everyday. The wound also needs to be irrigated and bandaged. I am unable to lift myself from the bathtub; unable to change my bed; unable to stock my bed with incontinent supplies (for my convenience due to my paralyzation); and unable to keep a pleasant and clean environment. The way this wound has to heal is to have a high protein/high fiber diet with plenty of liquids. Due to excessive immobility, I am unable to obtain the groceries that I need from various health food stores.

At this time, I realize that I need the people that love me to participate in an active way. We are organizing a sisterhood of loving support for me. We are asking you to donate six hours for one day out of each month until the area is healed and I regain my strength.

There are questions that you should ask yourself about how you can help me in this time:

1. How would you be in this healing space with me?
2. Why would you be in this healing space with me?
3. What would you expect from being in this healing space with me?

For more information or to volunteer your time, call Amy at 465-9864.

#### **MEETING SPACE AVAILABLE**

The Center for Third World Organizing Retreat and Training Center is available for groups interested in a comfortable and accessible place to meet. The center can sleep up to 25 people and can accommodate groups of up to 50 people for meetings. Rental includes use of all the meeting rooms, the dining hall and the kitchen. Groups seeking meeting space can make weekday reservations. Rates: Weekend overnight: \$25/person (min. 2 nights). Weekend overnight: \$22/person. Meeting rate: Monday-Thursday \$5/person. Location: 1218 E 21st St., Oakland. For reservation, please call (415) 533-8064 or 654-9601 and ask for Alfredo DeAvila.

The Jon Sims Center For the Performing Arts is a multi-disciplinary force for artistic freedom and cultural democracy based in the Bay Area Lesbian/Gay community. We have a national focus to present, foster, and promote unique arts and media performances, as well as educational programs, that serve the needs of our members and the general public. Through the power of performance we bring a message of compassion and hope to a rainbow of diverse groups. Our goal is to celebrate, empower, and transform people's lives. We are looking for people of color who by serving as board members will take hold of this vision and lead us forward. For further information, contact: Kathy Hennig, (415) 345-1886.

# Calendar

## DANCE

### Sunday, April 21

Dance performance at La Peña. Afro-Cuban music and dance with Batacongo, followed by "musica bailable" for all to join in! 8pm, \$7, 3105 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley. 849-2568.

### Wednesday-Saturday, April 24-27

"Black Choreographers Moving" explores the dynamic interchange of Black choreographers and contemporary dance through performances (4/24-4/27) and panel discussions (4/21-4/28.) At Theatre Artaud, 450 Florida St. at 17th St., S.F. For program details and other information call 621-7797.

## EVENTS

### Wednesday, April 24

The Aché Series continues: Pomo Afro Homos present: "Fierce Love: Stories from Black Gay Life." Through performance, dance, music & spoken word, Pomo Afro Homos, a performance group of Black gay men, present a "photo album" of de-

termination, differences, and "dish" that captures the unique perspectives of Black gay life featuring Eric Gupton, Brian Freeman and Bernard Branner. 8pm. \$8. La Peña, 3105 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley. All Aché events are wheelchair accessible/ noone turned away for lack of funds.

### Thursday, April 25

Alice Walker will read briefly and sign copies of her new book: Her Blue Body All We Know: Earthling Poems, 1965-1990 Complete. 8pm at 777 Valencia St.

S.F. For more information call 821-4675. Free admission, donations to Old Wives Tales, gratefully accepted.

### Friday-Sunday, April 26-28

"Toward a New Majority for Justice and Peace: A Conference for Activists of Color" will promote future organizing for peace in the Middle East and work for a truthful commemoration in 1992 of the invasion of the Americas by Christopher Columbus. Pre-registration \$20-30, \$12-15 seniors; registration at the conference \$30-40, \$14-18. Scholarships

are available. Dwinelle Hall, U.C. Berkeley campus.

### Saturday, April 27

Ninth Annual Whole Life Expo at The Concourse Exhibition Center. 8th St. & Brannan, S.F.

Luisah Teish, "Positive Tribalism," Author of "Jambalaya," performer and ritualist, presents a special workshop that focuses on contacting, reconciling, and celebrating the nine layers of the spirit. Participants will delve into the racial consciousness to find our commonalities. You are asked to bring writing materials and wear clothes that you can sweat in. For more information call 333-4373.

### Friday-Saturday, May 3-4

1st Northern California Conference on African-American Women and HIV - sponsored by the Black Coalition on AIDS. Childcare provided but limited space available, scholarships also available. City College, SF. For more information call 553-8197.

SPRING IN BOSTON! An opportunity to take out your favorite couple with a five no and a trip

to Boston. BID WHIST Tournament. Saturday, May 4 at 7 pm. 4768 Belfast Ave., Oakland. \$100 Grand Prize \$20 per couple to register, includes Bar-b-que plate. To register, send \$20 to the Nia Collective, P.O. Box 20835, Oakland, CA 94620. Registration deadline is April 26. For more information, phone 658-7737. \$6 admission for observers, includes Bar-b-que plate.

### Sunday, May 5

Pre-Mother's day potluck. Come celebrate our queen of life. Music, surprise entertainment. 3-7pm, Midgett's home. For more information call 648-3658.

### Thursday-Sunday, May 9-12, 16-18

Sapphire Theatre Company invites you to their 1st year anniversary celebration "An Evening of Empowerment."

Late Night at Studio Rhino  
10:15pm

"A Black Woman Speaks" written by Beah Richards with Dionne Pinckney; "A Tribute to Billie Holiday" with Chantile Lewis and more. Not to be missed!! \$7-10. Theatre Rhinoceros, 2926 - 16th St., S.F. information: 861-5079.

# THE **ACHE** SERIES CONTINUES...

**POMO AFRO HOMOS  
PRESENT:**

## **"FIERCE LOVE"**

### **STORIES FROM BLACK GAY LIFE**

**FEATURING BERNARD BRANNER,  
BRIAN FREEMAN & ERIC GUPTON**

THROUGH PERFORMANCE, DANCE, MUSIC AND SPOKEN WORD, POMO AFRO HOMOS, A PERFORMANCE GROUP OF BLACK GAY MEN, PRESENTS A "PHOTO ALBUM" OF DETERMINATION, DIFFERENCE, AND "DISH" THAT CAPTURES THE UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES OF BLACK GAY LIFE, AND EXPLORES THE DISPUTED ALLIANCES BLACK GAY MEN OFTEN CONFRONT. BEYOND "SNAP DIVAS" AND "SNOW QUEENS," FIERCE LOVE IS A CHALLENGING LOOK AT THE STRUGGLES BLACK GAY MEN FACE IN DEFINING THEIR COMMUNITY, IN FINDING THEIR WAY HOME.

**WED., APRIL 24TH  
8PM, TIX - \$8**

**A SPECIAL FILM  
BY DIRECTOR**

**MICHELLE PARKERSON**

### **"...BUT THEN, SHE'S BETTY CARTER" (FILM - 53 MIN.)**

**AN UNFORGETTABLE  
CINEMATIC PORTRAIT OF  
THE LEGENDARY JAZZ  
VOCALIST. THIS SPECIAL  
FILM BY DIRECTOR  
MICHELLE PARKERSON,  
CAPTURES BETTY CARTER'S  
MUSICAL GENIUS & HER  
FIERCE DEDICATION TO  
PERSONAL & ARTISTIC  
INDEPENDENCE.**

**A MUST SEE FILM -  
DON'T MISS IT!!**

**WED., MAY 28TH,  
7:30PM**

**DONATIONS ACCEPTED.**

**LA PEÑA CULTURAL CENTER  
3105 SHATTUCK AVE. (NR. ASHBY), BERKELEY**

**ALL ACHE EVENTS ARE WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE/NO ONE TURNED AWAY FOR LACK OF FUNDS**

# ONE WORLD



"Ach ." Ach , vol. 3, no. 2, April-May, 1991. Archives of Sexuality and Gender, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/CVXLDC404443111/AHSI?u=umuser&sid=bookmark-AHSI&xid=d44e335d](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CVXLDC404443111/AHSI?u=umuser&sid=bookmark-AHSI&xid=d44e335d). Accessed 8 Dec. 2022.