

AKHE

SUMMER 1993
VOL. 5, NO. 2
\$4

A JOURNAL FOR LESBIANS OF AFRICAN DESCENT



▼ ARTWORK BY JACKIE HILL ▼

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CONTENTS

1

SUMMER 1993
VOLUME 5 NO. 2



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ALL ART AND GRAPHICS

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▼ FROM THE EDITOR	2
▼ LETTERS TO ACHÉ	3
▼ FROM THE BOARD	4
▼ LIFESTYLES	
QUEEN COUGAR: 1ST BLACK	
MS. SAN FRANCISCO LEATHER by Sauda Burch	5
AVOTCJA: WE HEAR YOUR SONG by Laura Post	9
▼ SPIRITUALITY	
HEALING AND OTHER ACTS	
OF FAITH AND SURVIVAL by Donna Daniels	12
▼ HEALTH	
AIDS, WOMEN AND HIV by Mercedes	15
▼ ARTS & CULTURE	
RACE MATTERS reviewed by Dawn Lundy Martin	17
LIVING IN SECRET reviewed by Rhonda A. Pretlow	18
SISTAH ACTION!	19
▼ FEATURES	
THE VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE by Ayofemi Folayan	20
S/M: SEXUAL DEVIANCE OR SEXUAL FREEDOM?	
by Samiya A. Bashir	27
THOUGHTS ON JUDGEMENT by Aina Herbert	29
ON MONOGAMY by J.L. Vest	30
▼ FEATURED ARTIST: JACKIE HILL	22
▼ POETRY	
A PRAYER FOR MY WOMAN by Adrienne Y. Nelson	32
THIS TIME: AN OPEN LETTER TO GOD by Leigh A. Mosley	33
THE GARDEN POEM by Cara Page	33
FAKE... by Darlene Angela	34
IS YOU IS, OR IS YOU AIN'T...	
A REAL BLACK WOMAN? by Cara Page	35
THAT MULATTO TALK by Jennifer Lisa Vest	36
▼ FICTION:	
MISS BETSY'S WORD by Renita Lynnet Martin	37
KEEPING SECRETS by Blake C. Aarens	39
THE NATURAL ME by Nadine E. Jones	42
▼ BULLETIN BOARD	43



Photo by Andy Kohr

faces?

It's a painful truth that we have a tendency to become judge, jury, executioner, killing our own kind. The reasons to love, honor, and respect each other are legion, and the taste of sisterlove is sweet on the tongue. Yet we fasten onto what's easiest and most bitter tasting and suck it dry. We

CONTROVERSY BEGINS AT HOME

Greetings my Sisters!

It is with great pride that I present to you this, the summer issue of *Aché*. I agreed to guest edit partly as a favor to the standing Senior Editor, Natalie Devora, and partly as a favor to myself. Working on a project whose topic is controversy has given me the opportunity to confront the controversies in my own life and to stand before you in my truth.

I am a lesbian of African descent. My ex-husband is a white Jewish man. I participate in SM. I have dated white women. I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. I have sexual fantasies about men.

I tell you these things because I want you to know me. I also want to know you. I want to know which of you will hear the facts of my herstory and dismiss me. More importantly, I want to know toward whom I can turn with my truth and find love and acceptance. For you see, it is Black women I love most and fear most.

It is my belief that the greatest controversy is not about what we do in our beds or in our minds. It is about what we do to each other. Do we allow each other to grow? To risk being vulnerable? To make choices and decisions from the strength of our own knowing? Or do we write off a sister at a moment's notice, just as so many of our families wrote us off when we came out to them, or as this society tries to write us off the moment they peer into our brown

drown ourselves and our sisters in the acid we brew in our mouths.

With this issue, I challenge myself and all of you to do something truly controversial; in the face of societal censure, love another woman of African descent. Begin with the one you see in the mirror every morning and branch out from there. Love the young sister strolling through the Castro dressed in leather, the gray-haired matron coming out of church on Sunday morning, and yes, love the sister with straightened hair holding the hand of her blonde, blue-eyed girlfriend. Love these women not for how they look or what they do, but simply because they are. For the survival of even one Black woman is cause for celebration. And a sister who holds her head high and allows no one to give her grief about her choices is someone we can all follow onto the battleground of self-determination.

We need each other. We love each other. Let's make a point to show these truths in ways that we can both hear and hold. We have the power to make this happen.

Aché!

Blake C. Harris

We hope this leave of absence has given Natalie the time and space she needed to take care of herself. We welcome her back for the fall issue. Deadline for submissions is August 3.

Dear Natalie Devora,
Senior Editor, Aché

I enclose a check for \$50 to extend my subscription to the Aché Journal and as a small contribution to your enterprise.

Your magazine is extremely interesting and inspirational. The poetry crackles, the essays instruct, the artwork and photographs illuminate, and the erotica stimulates many desires. I know that Aché is "A Journal for Lesbians of African Descent" but this reader is a heterosexual male of Latvian-Russian descent. Go figure.

I too felt a great sense of loss at the horribly premature death of Audre Lorde. Her collections, *Sister Outsider* and *A Burst of Light*, were inspired passionate writings that had a powerful effect on me too. Call it hybrid vigor, genuine multi-cultural diversity or whatever. It worked. The entire Audre Lorde Memorial Section is first-rate but the photograph on page six says it all for me.

According to the "Aché Wish List" on page four, you're looking for file cabinets. I have a five drawer, steel suspension, letter-sized cabinet in excellent condition. Unfortunately, it's sitting in a storage unit here in Chico. However, if someone with a small truck or large station wagon is passing by Chico anytime, I'd be happy to maneuver it into the car for them. Please let me know if that seems to be a possibility.

With best wishes for continued success in your publishing and other activities.

Sincerely yours,

Charles L. Gesheker

Pub. note: Anyone out there with a truck passing through the Chico area?

Dear Blake Aarens [cc: Aché],

I am delighted to inform you that your recent work: "I Have Something For You," Aché, February/March 1992, has been nominated and accepted for inclusion in the premier volume of *The Best American Erotica 1993*, which is scheduled to be published in trade paperback in 1993 by Collier Books at MacMillan Publishing.

This new series, honoring the best of American erotic writing each year, follows in the steps of Collier's successful *Best of American Poetry* series. I am especially pleased that erotic fiction, and your work in particular, has the occasion to be appreciated and anthologized in such a manner.

I have previously edited three volumes of erotic fiction by women authors (*Herotica I, II* and forthcoming, *III*), and I have long desired to edit an anthology of the finest quality work by women and men with a breadth of erotic content. The first volume from Collier's will be a pioneering collection in this regard.

I am delighted to see what good company the first volume has brought together. You have written a piece of outstanding erotic fiction and I believe that this state of the art collection will be particularly well-received and rewarded.

Best regards,

Susie Bright,
Editor, *Best of American Erotica*

To the women of Aché,

"First they came for the Jews, I was silent, I was not a Jew. Then they came for the communists, I was silent, I was not a communist. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me."

This excerpt stands as a haunting reminder of what will occur again if

we do not build the alliances we have with each other as disenfranchised groups. We must combat the current political and religious right's attempt to splinter oppressed groups. We, as gay men and lesbians, must look beyond one political and social agenda to embrace the issues we all have as oppressed people, the issues of freedom and equality.

I ask you now to look with me at our brothers and sisters in the community. We represent every ethnicity, all genders, every form of physical challenge, and the spectrum of sexual orientation. This diversity must be protected. We must take on the causes of our brothers and sisters as our own. As we do, we will see just how similar our efforts are.

Gay men must take up our sisters' fight over reproductive rights. There is little difference between the battle women wage over control of their bodies and men's fight over existing sodomy laws. The Spanner convictions over consensual S/M mirrors this country's prohibition of Native American's from performing their religious rituals. The exact arguments used 50 years ago to keep African Americans out of the military are being used now to ban our brothers and sisters. During World War II, thousands of Japanese Americans were interned. And today I see people living with AIDS and tuberculosis also being quarantined without legal hearings.

History will repeat itself if we allow it. Gay men and lesbians, this is a call to arms. We must actively strive for a coalition of all oppressed groups. Only with a united front will we make a difference. We must come together as a community, with love and with pride, and refuse to be silenced.

Edward Kaufman,
Mr. Pit Leather '93

ACHÉ EDITORIAL STATEMENT

Aché is a quarterly 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 us 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 the person or persons.

ACHÉ SUBMISSION POLICY

The deadline for submissions is the first Monday two months prior to publication. Neatly handwritten, typed materials, and 3.5" Macintosh disks using MacWrite, or Microsoft Word are accepted. Include name, address and phone number on all submissions as well as a biographical statement no longer than 20 words. Please specify if you would not like your full name reproduced in Aché. Please do not submit originals, we do not have the resources to return them. All artwork should be sent to Art Editor c/o Aché. Artwork is accepted in black and white. Each issue shall showcase the work of the featured artist. A SASE should be included to insure the return of each individual's work. Please do not send originals.

ACHÉ PROJECT PAGE

FROM THE 1993 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We often hear "Aché is the only thing we've got!" Well, this is exactly the type of ownership we need in order to maintain this project. Now that we've got it, let's keep it! In other words, we need your support, your commitment and dedication, to continue the success we've experienced so far.

Many sisters have come forth to volunteer their help and we have not forgotten you. We now have a few designated projects for you to choose from:

- Giving a fundraising party, BBQ, gathering, etc.
- Soliciting writings & artwork submissions for the journal
- Staffing an Aché table at an event
- Grantwriting
- Producing events
- Answering phones at our office during the day
- Selling current and back issues of the journal
- Distributing flyers and subscription information
- Hosting an Aché open house

For those who don't know we now have a beautiful storefront office at 3122 Shattuck Ave. in Berkeley located directly across the street from La Peña Cultural Center. The beautiful storefront paint job is the work of this issue's featured artist Jackie Hill and the office interior has a new, warm antique white finish thanks solely to the labor of Adalia Selket. Even with all of the attention the office has already received, it is still in need of tender loving care. So, the Board of Directors would like to invite the entire community to participate in the "It's Our House" building campaign. Of course financial donations are the kind we can take to the bank but donated labor is also welcome. The first task in this campaign is to raise funds to renovate the office. Remember, a commitment to ourselves is a commitment to our community... "It's Our House."

Already this year Aché has been supported by grants from the Vanguard Foundation with a grant for \$4,500 and the Chicago Resource Fund with a grant for \$6,000. Also, Vanguard gave Aché full tuition for two board members to attend a fundraising workshop held by the Center for Third World Organizing. Can our community match this? Can we give to ourselves?

Finally, the board would like to invite the community to attend our regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, July 6th at 6:30pm. We will be discussing the future of Aché. We would like to hear from you and listen to your constructive suggestions. We hope that you are well and peace be with you. Adios!

Earthlyn Manuel
Chairperson, Aché Board of Directors

**CHECK OUT ACHÉ'S NEW EVENTS HOT-
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ACHÉ WISH LIST

File cabinets ♦ laserprinter ♦ fax machine ♦ copy machine ♦
Macintosh computer equipment ♦ sofa ♦ folding chairs

Queen Cougar: "Leather"

by Sauda Burch

Colleen Small, Queen Cougar, is the current and first Black Ms. San Francisco Leather. I talked with Colleen after she submitted a piece to Ache' discussing her s/m practice as an African-American lesbian.

Tell me about becoming Ms. San Francisco Leather.

Part of my s/m and leather practice is exhibitionism. You don't enter a contest unless you have a touch of that. I went to the contests last year, and what the people did to win—performance of fantasies and the speeches, I knew I could do. I wasn't sure that I would have the support; I didn't know many people and winning was partly dependent on having people there to vote for you. I'm also clean and sober and consistently attend meetings. I would go to a leather AA (Alcohol Anonymous) s/m meeting and we would go for coffee afterwards and talk about past contests. I thought I could put something together—I have a background in theater and I love to perform. I overcame my concern that I wouldn't have the votes. People would have to get to know me. I was building a group of friends from recovery meetings. These people pumped me up for the contest.

Pumped you up?

Yeah. There is quite a bit of apathy

around these contests. A lot of people who do participate in contests have done it for years and lately only a few women run. The men have a lot more contests than the women do. It's fun running for the title, but once you get it, people expect you to have political savvy and become a spokesperson for the community. Many women have seen how some title holders have been trashed or how people have handled those expectations—they are reluctant to run.

How long have you been "out" in the leather s/m community?

Technically, about four years. I had been playing with s/m since I was 12 years old though I didn't have the words or the understanding for it then. As a kid I was reading *The Story of O* and *Return to the Chateau*. As I moved into recovery, I became aware of the things I really liked. I discovered that I had not been completely expressing my sexual self. I got enough strength to accept what was really mine. I got to the point in my recovery where I was determined to survive. I let go of people's concern for who they thought I should be so that I could be who I really was.

You talked in your piece about the general lack of support you have gotten from African American lesbians regarding your s/m practice. Can you talk more about that?

I was going to a dance with a lesbian who was my lover at the time. She played with s/m, but like a lot of women of color didn't want anyone to know about it. . .

You think there are more lesbians of color practicing s/m than will admit it?

Absolutely. That's why I was able to play for years and not know what it was, and also not get good information about what I was doing. It was an unwritten rule that we didn't talk about what we did during sex. When I became more visible as a leather dyke, some lesbians of color asked my lover, "So your girlfriend is into s/m now and hanging out with those people?" My lover was in denial about her own behavior. She told them to ask me and not her. Now I don't believe we would have been together if we weren't mutually satisfying each other. Ultimately that relationship ended.

When I started to really wear leather and enjoy the company of other leather people, many lesbians moved away from me. To them I was befriending the "Nazis in the corner." Black lesbians treated me different when they found out that I was not ashamed to say that I practiced s/m. There were times when we would be planning a group gathering and someone would say, "You're not going to wear leather, are you?" And I would say, "It's a hot summer day so I don't see why I should, but I hope you



Photo by Myra Fourwinds

don't have a problem with it." These were women I had known for years.

Sounds like you lost some friends because of your s/m practice.

You know, I would say that I lost a lot more friends when I got into recovery. A number of women were my friends because we all did recreational drugs. I was known as being a fun person. When I got into recovery

these women avoided me because they thought I was no longer fun to be around, and also because they didn't want to confront their own stuff.

Do you think the same is true for lesbians who avoid you because you practice s/m—that they don't want to confront their own stuff?

Sure. A few women who have problems with my s/m were in relationships with me. They don't want to be associated with me because they don't want anyone to know that they are participating in or ever participated in s/m behavior. They know that some of the ways they "play" and have sex are part of s/m. People would prefer that you lie about this. Everything is okay as long as you aren't public about it.

When you were coming to terms with what you enjoy sexually, as you wrote, "a certain degree of pain coupled with pleasure was acceptable in my sexual experience," did you experience any conflict between your being African American and practicing s/m?

I knew the stigma associated with s/m and I was very aware of the stigma in communities of color. I always felt different from my friends. I came into the community and tried to fit in. Those who knew me then, except for a few close friends and lovers, didn't have an idea who I was. I had a past that had some abuse—I was a prostitute in LA before coming to the Bay Area. I never shared that with most people—everyone was so wholesome here. I wanted that life, so I thought if I let anyone know about my past they would push away from me. I've always been on the fringe. I thought that was why some women were attracted to me—clearly that's how I got girlfriends. The ones who claimed they were against this or that were really into certain s/m behaviors when we were alone.

Was this before you were naming it as s/m?

Right. I didn't equate that when someone smacks your butt, that was s/m.

People have ideas about what s/m is and isn't. Not everyone would agree that "smacking your butt" is s/m.

You are receiving pain in the midst of a pleasurable act. People call their experiences what they want to call them. You might think of s/m as a host of other behaviors that you choose never to be involved in. That doesn't mean what you do isn't s/m.

So what is your definition of s/m?

A degree of pain coupled with the possibility of pleasure. S/M is negotiation of experience within erotic situations. S/M people don't all do the same things; there is no one particular type of behavior. I think we eroticize pain and that seems ill to people. People think that pain could never be pleasurable.

Why do you think pain is eroticized?

It's a feeling thing. Why do people watch spooky or violent movies? No one considers those people to be a real problem.

Well, I do. When I am able to sit through a violent movie and not be completely horrified, I wonder about myself. I feel somewhat numbed to the daily violence in real life. I don't like it.

I agree we have been numbed to certain aspects of violence. Ultimately it comes down to a level of taste. Personal taste is complex. Not everyone will find some degree of pain acceptable. However, there are many people who do. Most people who practice s/m are doing so consensually between two rational adults. On some level we can accept some pain and not freak out about it. Who knows why?

How do you separate the contemporary understanding and

practice of s/m, with the documented origins of the practice? For example, how is the legacy of the Marquis de Sade and Nazi Germany connected to s/m as it is practiced today?

Contemporary s/m is about consensuality. What the Marquis de Sade and the Nazis did was not consensual. It had nothing to do with pleasure. It had everything to do with power and domination—and here words can get in the way because there is domination and submission in s/m "play" but by no means is it nonconsensual. If it is, it's unacceptable. The Marquis de Sade made us aware of behavior that already existed. We don't have to condone what he did. You won't find too many people who would accept mutilation of someone as acceptable. There is no pleasure in that.

So if your practice isn't about violence, degradation and humiliation as we have come to understand s/m, why continue to call the behavior s/m?

Some of the behaviors that the Marquis de Sade initiated are practiced in s/m. In the extreme, what de Sade did was objectionable. But we don't call what we do by another name because it is sadism and masochism. There are some "plays" or scenes that involve degradation or humiliation. But it's consensual. The "play" is about negotiation. Experienced players will not "play" with people who don't understand their own boundaries and limitations. That's dangerous. We are not in this to really get hurt or to hurt anyone else. Still, there are people who will exploit or abuse any situation. There are people in s/m who will use sadism to exploit their desire to lash out for the things that happened to them. There are also people who also use the "play" in s/m to heal from past abuse situations.

Let's talk about the person who uses sadism to work out her issues. When do you know that a person has healed from her abuse enough where it

does not become part of the s/m "play"?

Negotiation is key. If you are talking about "playing" with someone and you get the sense that this person is saying to you that they understand your boundaries, but will make you accept what they want you to do ... Well, on a titillation level you might think that person's power is exciting. On another level, you know that you are talking to someone who's not going to respect your boundaries. You cannot put yourself in the hands of someone like that. You can get hurt. I stress negotiation whenever I talk about s/m or when I am sitting with people who are new to the community. Sit, watch, listen and learn, first. If you see a person be very mean to their lover, chances are they are going to bring that behavior into their relationship with you.

But if you haven't healed—the effects of abuse can manifest in a person feeling that they deserve the violence—you might well walk away with that person.

Responsible "tops" would choose not to "play" with that person because the possibility of doing damage is greater with someone who thinks that it is okay to be treated badly. There are people who would take that person aside and talk with them.

Is this responsible behavior indicative of most of the s/m community or are you specifically talking about people in recovery?

When people drink and use they can't be rational. Consensuality, rationality and responsibility in the s/m community means that people who drink and drug don't do it when they are "playing". Whether you are a top and you're taking control over someone or if you are a bottom and you are giving up control, you don't do that in an altered state of consciousness. This is understood throughout the community.

People who "play" loaded do not represent the whole s/m commu-

nity. At "play" parties people who come loaded are asked to leave. As in any community there are people who do things that are against what the majority are about—we are not about hurting each other as lesbians, but there are lesbians who batter their lovers. We would be offended if someone thought that this was what the whole lesbian community was about. Society gets the wrong impression of s/m because the very visible people in the community are often the ones that are "troubled". That's what the title holder is about, creating a positive image on the visual level—that as s/m people we can take care of business and our community, sponsor events, give talks, educate, without being totally objectionable.

When do you think private behavior become community business?

If someone claims they have been severely abused by me then it becomes community business—abuse is community business. Consensuality, what goes on behind closed doors, is my business. People can voice their opinion of what they don't understand, but I expect them to accept what I do as long as I am taking care of the people I am relating to. I'm not killing anyone, grabbing kids off the street or robbing people of their personal rights. Honey, if someone is beating my ass I expect you to save me or talk to me or tell that person to stop. But if I am clear and rational, and not impeding anyone from doing what they need to do, let me do what I want to do. That doesn't stop me from being a sister and loving you.

A sister might say that being anti-s/m is loving you.

I'm fine with concern. There needs to be more dialogue. If a friend comes to me from a place of love and care because they have a history with me and worry that I am doing something that could harm me, I'm open to looking at that. That's support. After that, you have to let go. I am an adult making rational decisions about my life. If I'm really having a problem it will ultimately come out.

Concern is not intrusion. It's intrusion when the person seems to be

saying, "I don't think you should do that because I wouldn't do that." They are judging you based on their values. If people are in your life only if you step the path they step, are those people really your friends?

Where do you think we can meet as African American lesbians? I imagine for some s/m brings up the painful history of slavery in the U.S. and the Diaspora.

First, not to be facetious, I grew up in the Bronx and not on a plantation. This has to be a harder issue for someone my mother's or grandmother's age. I cannot relate to the connection of the s/m lifestyle to slavery. I'm not going to have a relationship with someone who does not respect me. Clearly there was no respect between masters and slaves. In the s/m community people who play that scene mutually respect each other. It's not a demeaning situation. If it is, those people are in it for the wrong reasons.

Some lesbians say that I'm not a member of the community of color because I practice s/m. How's that? Whenever I walk into a room full of white people I'm a woman of color. I will not change because I am not doing what is accepted in your circle. I have the ancestors and the history that I have. I respect and love my culture. I am a beautiful, Black woman. I would not be a part of any community that would not respect that. I have gotten respect because I have given myself that respect. I will accept

nothing less. I am not ashamed; I don't have to be.

We compartmentalize each other. Instead of giving our support, we force each other to separate into a thousand cubby holes. And if you become visible out of one of those, like I have done, you become open for everything and anything. People who are not accepting and supporting you are not feeding you emotionally. I can get support from people who wear leather and have whips and chains at home or people who wear cotton and Birkenstocks. You get your support where it is.

What would be your advice to lesbians who are interested in s/m?

Educate yourself. Read *The Lesbian Safe Sex Manual*, *Macho Sluts* and/or *Coming to Power*. These books talk about women involved in rational s/m play. Stormy Leather in San Francisco is a good resource place. The store is primarily owned and managed by women. Take a class through QSM (Queer S/M); you get an opportunity to be in a workshop with other interested people at all different levels. You might contact the "Outcasts", a women's SM group in San Francisco. Sometimes people need to see what the scene is about. Get information first. When I got into the lifestyle intensely, I didn't "play" for a while, I just watched. I talked with people, even women I was attracted to, but I watched and listened because I had to figure out who was for real and who wasn't. Don't be in a hurry to "play".

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AVOTCJA:

WE HEAR YOUR SONG,
WE NEED YOUR SONG,
WE LOVE YOUR SONG

Interviewed by Laura L. Post

Avotcja Jiltoniro is a musician/vocalist/dj/off-Broadway composer/photographer/storyteller/teacher. In contemplating her, a comparison with Audre Lorde springs to mind. Both poets, both extraordinary creative spirits with powerful energy fields surrounding their persons, both women writing about and speaking of themselves and their lives. There's a rhythm to Avotcja's poetry, a jazz looseness to her rap, a Spanglish/island perspective to her blues; she spins multi-textured joy at the literary, benefit, revolutionary, Third World, and women's events where she performs.

Born in Brooklyn, raised in Spanish Harlem, influenced by boleros, African, Euro-classical, salsa, calypso, gospel, blues and jazz styles, Avotcja is a Black Puerto Rican whose many talents and barrier-dissolving manner are evidenced by her wide successes and in the diversity of those with whom she has shared a stage: Diane Di Prima, Linda Tillery, Rachel Bagby, Mary Watkins, Mother Tongue, Women of All Red Nations, Casselberry/Dupréé, Pat Parker and Dance Brigade. Avotcja has also written three books: *La Voz Boricua*, *Oh Yeah*, and *Aché/Power*, one in English, one in Spanish and one bilin-



Photo by Victor Hall

gual. She has penned a tome of poetry, short stories, photography, and historical documentation, *Pura Candela/Pure Fire*, and her cassette *Has Anybody Heard My Song?* was recently released. Not only does she inspire in the moment, but she has the vision and

courage to empower the next generation: *Inside These Walls* is a collection by prisoners and *Ghetto Flowers, Volumes I and II*, due out soon, are the work of her students.

I want to begin by asking a little about your family.

I'm from a family that's from the Caribbean. I'm the first generation in the City. My family is Puerto Rican, Black Puerto Rican, and I come from a long line of performing artists. In my growing up, I was surrounded by arts. My mother and father were both dancers; my grandmother was a show girl; my great-grandparents were in show business.

From very young, I was in love with music, I was crazy about music. When I was 14, and got a guitar, my mother had dreams of me sounding like Segovia. At that point I wanted to, but then I heard the blues and heard Blind Lemon Jefferson and Leadbelly and Arsenio Rodriguez from Cuba and wanted to play like them. My mother almost had a heart attack, so I left home with my guitar and fifty cents.

What did you do? Where did you go?

I had already gotten strung out—there's a mythology that most artists are dope fiends and drunks—so I became a dope fiend and a drunk. I loved Mexican trios, they were real popular in Puerto Rico and among Puerto Ricans, so I went to Mexico for a while to hear them. Then, Canada, and the West Coast, California, 'the runaway state.' In California, if one has parental consent, one can be declared an emancipated minor; the day before I was 16, I wound up in California. I looked very young, so people that would hire kids for almost nothing would give me horrible jobs. From the way I talked they knew I wasn't quite as young as I looked, and so I got hired at the playground to work with kids who were learning how to read and write in English and Spanish.

I now work in the public school system and in the county jail, teaching creative writing and music, especially getting people who may not be proficient in King's English — like anybody wants to talk like a king in the first place! — to look at things for what they really are. I'm basically getting people, English-speaking people and Black Americans, some Asians, and a lot of Latins as well, to realize that they have their own brilliance and to use it.

What we call 'switch-hittin,' to be able to speak the King's English when it comes time to get a job and then go back to talking whatever they talk, you know, ghetto rap, barrio rap, as soon as you walk away. I've taught a lot of places; after I cleaned up my drug habit, in 1970, it became more continuous.

How did you get started as a dee-jay?

When I first came out to California, I was asked (because I'm known to be a collector, a fanatic as far as collecting music) to come down to this or that radio station with some of my records. Then, two men asked me to do their KALX program because they were going out of town, on vacation, for two weeks. They showed up several months later, and I had gotten the first program on a non-commercial radio station to get ratings; after that, other stations started coming after me.

At first, I was playing Latin music; then, I just had to slip in some of the Mighty Sparrow, and Lady Trixie, and calypso stuff, and folks loved it. I started slipping in jazz and blues and all kinds of African stuff, and folks went crazy over it, and that's what my shows became. I currently do two shows: Thursdays, at KPFA, a mix of African, calypso, jazz, and salsa, with blues thrown in, and KPOO, Fridays.

The last Thursday of the month, I do a blues program. There's a weird blues segregation trip out here that nobody wants to talk about; I and Gorman Lee are the only Black blues deejays in the Bay Area. The white blues programs, they talk about blues like they talk about folklore, like it's dead. Like it died with Howlin' Wolf or Muddy Waters, but it's not dead, it's very much alive. I play that older stuff, but I also play a lot of the stuff that's happening now, and it is happening, big time. Both styles are real popular, and there's room enough for both of them.

Let's talk about your writing...

I'm doing a biography of Connie Williams. Connie is the person who was the real founder of Carnival in the Bay Area, even though they've given credit to everyone else. Connie's a

Trinidadian who's in her eighties, and it's disgraceful what's happened; it's also a good lesson in what can happen to folks who do what they want to do and don't kiss people's behinds. They shined her on, and she's now living down in the Tenderloin after supporting everybody, including the Belafontes and Sidney Poitier.

Are you afraid of this happening to you at some point?

There's a lot of Connie in me, and I've just accepted the fact that may or may not happen. That's the price you pay for doing what you want to do. I know what I could do if I wanted to make sure that will never happen and I'm not willing to do that; I've already had the chance to do that.

This country has never had any respect for its seniors or Black folks to begin with, but I think life's too short to be worried about being afraid all the time. So, if you want to do something, and what you're doing is not what the mainstream wants, or the media wants, then you should be prepared to pay the price.

You did a set at last year's [1992] First West Coast Lesbian Festival, and have spoken highly of that experience. How did you get involved in the festival, and why was it so special?

When Pat Parker was alive, the last year's of Pat's life, we double-billed together. We were never lovers, only friends, but very close friends. I was clean and sober, and the fact that Pat wasn't was no secret. She liked being around me, and the ultimate show of friendship was that I never saw her drunk, and I know when I was using I could have never done that; that's the highest respect that anybody could ever give.

I was the one who had the 'in' with the Black circuit, the chitlin' circuit, the cuchifrito circuit. And she had the 'in' with the lesbian, the white lesbian circuit. And she had been led to believe by the group that she had run with all those years that Black folks would not like her, and I was led to believe that white lesbians couldn't

stand me, either.

Pat knew Marilyn Van Veersen, and when Pat died, Marilyn and I stayed friends, 'cause I loved working with her. She's so good [as an American Sign Language interpreter], like a dancer, and I just would be hypnotized by watching her. When she and [producer] Lin Daniels were putting together the lineup for the West Coast Lesbian Festival, I was one of the first people that Marilyn called, and she was very strong about letting me know that she really wanted me to play there. I was in shock, but I wound up being scheduled.

I was thinking that it was going to be everybody singing the same three chords and saying, "I am a lesbian. I am a woman. I am a lesbian woman." But then Marilyn started hiring people that I know, who are really good artists. Melanie DeMore, Rashida Oji, June and Jean Millington, Cheryl Harrison from up north, and lots of folks of color who have seen each other in passing over the years. Still, I thought that, with the exception of maybe Barbara Macdonald, I would be the oldest woman there, nobody else over 45. I also thought that there would be very few people of color, that me and

Melanie and Rashida and Cheryl and June and Jean would probably be the only people of color there.

When I got there it was just the complete opposite. There were all these seniors, so many people of color who were just being who they were. Nobody was forcing people into being somebody that they weren't, and people were dealing with each other on the basis of respect. It felt really good.

It can be real weird being a novelty and being one of two older people in the place, but I'm not that old by comparison to what was there. I'm 51 now, so I guess I was 50 then. There were women there who made me look like a kid, women that were old enough to be my mother, maybe my grandmother, and there weren't just one or two. There was an army of older women, and they weren't just cute little old ladies, I mean these were HELL-RAISERS! I loved it!!!

There was every kind of music you could think of. There were not only a lot of seniors, there were a lot of kids there, kids who were doing great and positive things. For me, that's what a festival is supposed to be like. I don't have enough praises to say about the festival. I think that it's the best thing going in the country,

and I want to see it grow. This planet is real crazy right now, and I respect Marilyn for going out of her way to make sure that there's going to be lots of people of color at the festival, on and off stage, great artists, not just having somebody of color who's filling a quota.

I'm afraid of people who have to have everybody sound the same and look the same. Something about that is real scary. I'd go so far as to say dangerous. There were some people who really tried to say some horrible things about the festival. Several of the so-called in-group gay papers shined us on and pretended the festival didn't happen, and that's real sad. They call it whatever they want, but racism by any other name is still racism. Just saying "I'm not a racist" doesn't prove anything. I, for one, need a whole lot more than being screwed, and fortunately, there are many others who feel the same.

For information on her upcoming performances, or to order her cassette or books, please write to: P.O. Box 422340, San Francisco, CA 94142-2340.

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Healing

and Other Acts of Faith and Survival

by Donna Daniels

When I was first asked to write a piece for *Aché* on African-based spirituality to be included in an issue on controversy I was a bit perplexed. While I had discussed some ideas with the editor, when I finally sat down at my computer I asked myself: Is the embrace of African spiritual principles by African-American women really controversial? After wrestling with this question for some time I decided yes, it is, because it reflects a non-Christian response to the range of personal, political and spiritual issues facing Black people. More importantly, this spiritual reverence represents a unique strategy which some Black women have employed to address the particular challenges that they face.

I first became aware of African-based traditions in 1987 as a student living in New Haven, Connecticut. I was reading Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* and Luisah Teish's *Jambalaya* at the same time. The African spiritual traditions that they focused on included the Yoruba tradition of West Africa and traditions which emerged as a result of the slave trade in the African diaspora: Santería (Cuba), Candomblé (Brazil) and Vodun (Haiti.) I remember thinking that communication with ancestors and spirits was intriguing especially since both Teish and Bambara seemed to be suggesting that healing, wellness, and an African American feminist consciousness were not only intricately related but necessary for a



Photo by Donna Daniels

Uzuri Amini with her altar to Olukun, the Yoruba Spirit of the Ocean.

Black woman's survival.

Six years later and now a doctoral student in anthropology and a practitioner of African-based spirituality, I am asking African American women and other women of color about their spiritual practices and, also, reevaluating my own. What has become clear to me is that while African-based religions such as Santería are traditionally practiced in houses or small communities of worship over which a Baba (Father) or Iya (Mother) presides, there exists in the Bay Area an informal network of healers, women who may or may not have been affiliated with a house who have chosen to practice by themselves or in small groups with other independent practitioners. Many such women describe their practice as focused upon or influenced by the Yoruba tradition

(the Catholic imagery and Catholic religious beliefs associated with Santería are not employed.) In other words, they may practice Yoruba exclusively or they may incorporate other traditions into their practice. Also, they may consult a Yoruba priest or priestess regularly or semi-regularly. The emphasis of their spiritual practice is on wellness in mind, body, and spirit and this is sought through prayer, meditation, and acts of healing.

While such independent practice may be viewed as controversial among some priests and priestesses who head houses in the broader Orisha community, what I believe is even more controversial is that a community of women of color has committed themselves to a regimen of self-love, self-affirmation, and wellness amidst a larger society

which seeks to limit, deny, and contain them through the daily forces of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. What gives rise to this type of positive commitment to self? I believe there are several general principles within the Yoruba tradition which require such a commitment.

First, there is the internal work which so many of us struggle to do daily wherein we honor ourselves and our ori—the divine principle with which we are born and which is seated in our head. (The head within Yoruba tradition is an important area in which many spiritual qualities are endowed and thus is of great significance both physically and metaphorically.)

Honoring the self should not be confused with being selfish or individualistic. Rather, that which is the



best that we may give to ourselves is what may also be shared and must be shared with others.

Balance is another spiritual quality crucial to this tradition—balance or that ability to be centered is predicated on knowledge of the self. When one is balanced, one has an understanding of those qualities which are one's strengths as well as those tendencies which make us vulnerable. Through prayer and meditation one is able to understand the self and do the internal work which allows for balance.

A central aspect of the Yoruba tradition that is key for all of the independent practitioners as well as house members that I have interviewed is ancestor worship. For the African American women as well as Latinas who I have spoken to whose ancestral line was ruptured and transformed as a result of slavery and colonization, communication with and worship of one's ancestors is at once an act of defiance—given that many of the material forces which gave rise to these historical events remain with us today—as well as an act of healing and an act of self-love. To challenge history, and western notions of time and space in order to have relationships with those who have gone before us is often affirming and strengthening. Strategies for survival may be learned from those who suffered, boldness may replace passivity, and loving and nurturing relationships may continue even after someone has passed to the other side. A pantheon of deities is

“I believe... that a community of women of color has committed themselves to a regimen of self-love, self-affirmation, and wellness amidst a larger society which seeks to limit, deny, and contain them through the daily forces of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia.”

also a feature of this tradition. Interestingly while each person will have special relationships with a host of deities, all of the independent practitioners that I have talked to pay special homage to the power of the female deities Oshun, Yemaya and Oya. Lastly, reverence of nature often emerged in

our conversations as of great importance within these women's daily practices.

All of these qualities combine as a basis for healing and for promoting wellness. While many of the Black women I spoke to did not describe themselves as feminist their observations about their lives and their spiritual growth were informed by a feminist consciousness uniquely tied to their experiences as African Americans. A recognition of the ways in which their lives have been influenced by oppression surfaced in their musings. Whether it was dealing with racist people on a job, healing from an abusive relationship, or observing the aftermath of the first Rodney King verdict, spirituality and acts of healing served as one strategy for dealing with the issues which they confront in the world. I am not talking about some touchy-feely passive response of forgiveness or acceptance, I am describing instances in which women channel anger, frustration, and disappointment as well as hopefulness, vigilance, and strength into acts which empower them.

It is a radical act that African American women and other women of color in this culture feel good about themselves and the choices that they make in their lives. For some women the practice of African-based spirituality provides a path towards self-affirmation and self-love, and in so doing, women's acts of faith and healing emerge as expressions of self-empowerment.

PHOENIX AUTO

A Woman Owned Garage



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By Mercedes

AIDS Women and HIV

Let us waste no time. HIV, human immunodeficiency virus, is not waiting. So, like the disease itself, I must cut to the quick.

As ominous as it may sound, testing HIV positive does not mean that you have AIDS. What it does mean is that at some point the HIV virus was present in your body. In defense—as with all invaders—your immune system manufactured antibodies or natural vaccines to HIV. Because antibodies are specific to each foreign attacker, the theory is that to test HIV+, you must have been HIV infected. In addition, it is presumed that you are also a carrier—able to infect others. Did you know that some cases that appear to be “full-blown AIDS” never test positive for HIV? There have been gay men with Kaposi's Sarcoma (a classic AIDS disease) who never test HIV positive. There are many who test HIV+ and remain asymptomatic, showing no illness or symptoms from the virus. The problem I have with all this is the fact that just last year the World AIDS Conference in Amsterdam disclosed the fact that there is no absolute test for HIV. It has been labeled the peek-a-boo virus; test positive one day and negative the next. Why then, for ten plus years, has the public been deceived into putting their faith in a

bogus test? Laboratories have taken in billions while delivering false hopes. And anecdotal evidence suggests that when a UC Berkeley microbiologist questioned this very point, his funding was taken away.

AIDS is the worst illness that comes from being HIV infected. AIDS is over 90% fatal after 5 years of being diagnosed. The incubation period is even less for women. Other supposedly less fatal HIV-related illnesses, associated diseases, and related complexes do not seem any more attractive. In my research I viewed photographs of these victims. I saw pictures of pathological sections. They gave me a feeling of living death. The death of one time healthy glands and organs. I have never cried so much while researching. How can a virus which you have already created antibodies for come back from as far as ten years and completely shut down the immune system and kill? It seems that it cannot be the virus acting alone.

Over 80% of all AIDS victims in the U.S. are Black. Of American women with AIDS, Black women total 70%. The disproportionate ratio of Black victims of this killer is beyond belief and in my opinion beyond coincidence. What is more frightening is that these numbers are rising.

In 1985 the Centers for Disease

Control recorded only 93 women with AIDS. By 1987 this figure reached 3,126 with an estimated 100,000 HIV infected. The *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* dated May 12, 1989 reported 8,276 women with AIDS in 1988. In another report, I read that the figure for women with AIDS had reached 9,717 and these are only the reported cases. For your information, out of the 9,717 women with AIDS, only 79 are lesbians. While this is certainly a virus that loves Black people here and even more so in Africa, the American/Alaskan Indian seems to have the least risk as a race. As a sub-culture or lifestyle group lesbians show the least risk. While you cannot pick your race, you can choose your lifestyle. While I know that a virus cannot be discriminatory in itself, this one seems to be. Perhaps by design. Why is the victimization of Blacks so disproportionate to that of other world peoples? Is this a new kind of ethnic down-sizing? Why are millions dying on the continent of Africa—which also has the highest number of children with AIDS—a continent which has everything the capitalistic countries want?

With lesbians showing such a low risk, why worry? Well, although 90% of the people with AIDS are men, it is the women, many of them lesbian, who are the caretakers. There are special precautions to reduce the possibility of transmission while caretaking. Be aware that AIDS patients “are likely to be shedding latent reactivated viruses...as well as a variety of bacterial, fungal, protozoal, and other heretofore unidentified viral pathogens.” Lesbians have gay friends with HIV-related illnesses and AIDS. When it is said that AIDS is a gay disease, automatically lesbians are thrown into the barrel. Homophobia then, has an effect on your rights, housing, employment, insurance, and let's not forget violence against gays. If you are exploring donor insemination you are at risk of receiving HIV tainted semen. If you



are involved with a bisexual woman there is the possibility of male-to-female infection being transferred through female-to-female sex. The first documented female-to-female transmission appeared in the medical journals in 1984; however, no full scale study of woman-to-woman transmission has been conducted. There are four exposure categories for women (men have six.) The categories are: IV drug users, blood recipients, heterosexual contact, and no identified risk (NIR.) Woman-to-woman transmission is considered NIR. By the way, the NIR category is twice as large among women as it is for men.

What are the symptoms of HIV?

The first symptoms of HIV infection are the same as those of common infection, like cold or flu:

- unexplained swollen glands, especially the lymph nodes, for more than three months
- unexplained fever for more than ten days
- drenching night sweats
- unexplained prolonged fatigue
- severe diarrhea
- significant weight loss not due to dieting or exercise
- oral candidiasis or thrush (a thick whitish coating of the mouth or tongue)
- dry coughs, colds, or sore throats (in non-smokers) lasting several weeks

- appearance of purplish or discolored lesions of the skin or mucous membranes that do not go away and increase in size

- easy bruising and unexplained bleeding

If you think you are sick do not attempt to diagnose yourself, seek medical help.

What can I do towards prevention? Develop a healthy lifestyle. In other words, one that is harmonious with a healthy immune system. IV drug use is not harmonious. Practice anything that you are involved in safely. As one writer put it "do not allow another person's semen, blood, feces, vaginal secretions, or in the case of lactating mothers, mother's milk into your body." (Yes, infants can be infected through mother's milk.) I know this seems extreme, after all people have lived as family with other people with AIDS without masks, gloves, etc. and it was never transmitted. The idea is to use common sense. Exposure to HIV or any of the parasites, fungi, and viruses found among HIV + sufferers is common. **You cannot avoid exposure.** What you must do is maintain protection of a healthy immune system. Left open to invasion the result can lead to no defense.

Where can I get help or information? Contact your Public Health Service or your own physician.

Where can I go to help? You can become a practical support volunteer through Project Eden, AIDS Project/East Bay, Mission: AIDS, or by contacting Alameda County Health Services.

Good reading on AIDS:

Women & AIDS, Diane Richardson
Etiology, Diagnosis, Treatment and Prevention, DeVita, Henman, and Rosenberg

Room for Doubt, East Bay Express, July 19, 1991

Publisher's Note:

We encourage feedback on all pieces in this, our "controversy" issue. See page 19 for submission guidelines.

Book Reviews

Race Matters
by Cornel West
Beacon Press, 1993
\$15.00

by Dawn Lundy Martin

There are two things particular to Cornel West's new collection of critical essays, *Race Matters*. He openly critiques black American culture without the tenuous guide of any romanticized notion about his community. Secondly, his Marxist Christian perspective is one that encompasses the liberation of all peoples, genuinely, not hierarchically positing the so-called "African-American struggle" at the top without drawing parallels to the Palestinian struggle, the Cuban struggle, the women's movement and the gay movement. In his speeches and writings, West is always careful to illustrate the road which helped to shape his philosophies as one lined with both women and men, gay and straight, black, brown and white—all whispering intense

notions of justice and liberation into his ear.

When West spoke at Cody's Books, sporting the kind of dark suit a Southern Baptist preacher might wear, his body hunched over as if to signify his humbleness amongst the creatures of God, he

was in stark contrast to the casual, self-absorbed intelligencia of Berkeley. Leaning slightly onto the podium, there was just enough humor in his voice to infuse the audience with a sense of hope. West makes that distinction often—between "hope" and "blind optimism." The latter breeds stagnancy. He seems to be saying, no, everything is not going to be all right—unless we do something. West is quick to acknowledge those activists and visionaries who came before him. Often, in his talks, as if he is actually evoking a ghost, he appears to speak half to himself, half to the audience, asking, "What kind of America would we have without the contributions of Audre Lorde and James Baldwin? They gave their entire lives for black people!" In *Race Matters* he confronts the homophobia rampant in the African-American community by comparing that type of mentality to white conservatism:

"In black America, cultural conservatism takes on inchoate xenophobia (e.g., against whites, Jews, and Asians,) systematic sexism, and homophobia. Like all conservativisms rooted in a quest for order, the pervasive disorder in white and, especially, black America, fans and fuels the channeling of rage toward the most vulnerable and degraded members of the community." (27)

Race definitely matters but ide-

ology matters more. In this period of late capitalism, skin color is far from what determines one's cultural perspective, or one's politics.

What's crucial about West's text is that he is adept in his ability to identify black cultural conservatism and hatred of whites (as a group) and at the same time acknowledge and condemn the white supremacy endemic in this society. He can be a Christian and simultaneously castigate any notions that reveal themselves as either covert homophobia and/or blatant discrimination.

It would be an incredible oversight, however, if I failed to acknowledge and support the other basis for West's interpretation of the world—the inherent evils of capitalism, or what he calls a "market-driven society." In almost every utterance, West subverts the dominant paradigm by exposing the nature of its ills. The concept is that America as we know it, the whole idea of it, based on wealth (for a very, very few) at the expense of a mass (growing) poor, is our greatest challenge. In 1989, "1 percent of the population owned 37 percent of the wealth and 10 percent of the population owned 86 percent of the wealth," while the rest of us are left to battle for the crumbs. (6) This period of late capitalism is one in which companies who have made their largest profit ever are in the true tradition of America solidifying their greed by cutting full-time workers to half-time and laying off thousands of employees. The idea is that there will be growing amounts of hopelessness, despair and nihilism cross-culturally. West's point, however, is that racism, sexism, and homophobia are those modes of discrimination by which the rich will continue to hoard the nation's wealth

for themselves. To be black and lesbian positions us amongst the ranks of those most likely to be considered by the dominant culture as disposable. For Cornel West, though, who now teaches at Princeton University in New Jersey, late-capitalism does not mean that we should lay down our weapons. On the contrary, in order for America to continue, it must be recreated. He writes:

Let us hope and pray that the vast intelligence, imagination, humor and courage of Americans will not fail us. Either we learn a new language of empathy and compassion, or the fire this time will consume us all. (8)

Living in Secret by Cristina Salat.

New York:
Bantam Books,
1993, 183 pp.
\$15 hardcover

by Rhonda A. Pretlow

"A QUESTION OF ASSUMPTIONS"

Recently there has been much emphasis on family values and the question of what a family is or should be.

Numerous books and movies deal with families which appear "normal" on their surface, but upon deeper examination are found to be rife with abuse and neglect. *Living in Secret*, a young adult novel by Cristina Salat, portrays the adventures of a non-traditional family and raises many intriguing questions about our society's assumptions of what is normal and what is family. It is an entertaining, challenging book for young and "old" readers alike.

The story is told from the point of view of eleven-year-old Amy Monet. Following her parents' divorce she is given into the custody of her father where she remains for a number of years, despite her desire to live with her mother. The book begins with Mom coming in the middle of the night to "steal" Amy away.

Living in Secret is well-written and has the thrills and excitement of a good detective story: letters mailed from other cities, disguises, false names, all the stuff of which good thrillers are made, but with a twist. Rather than the main character acting as a child detective, she is instead the object of a search by her father's detective.

Through immediate, present-tense narration, readers can put themselves in Amy's place and try to come up with their own answers to some of the hard questions she is faced with.

Is her mother a bad person because she chooses to share her life with another woman? Is her father bad for preventing Amy from seeing her mother? Is running away the answer? Should Amy tell her friends about her unusual family?

The main character and the reader learn much about the price of taking risks and making choices.

To be a family, Amy, her

mother and her mother's girlfriend, Janey, must conceal their identity and assume a new history. The web of lies Amy finds herself entangled in grows when she makes friends with Elizabeth, who initially suspects that Amy's evasiveness is racially motivated. This book includes characters with varied racial and familial backgrounds, and pride in diversity is its subtle, powerful theme.

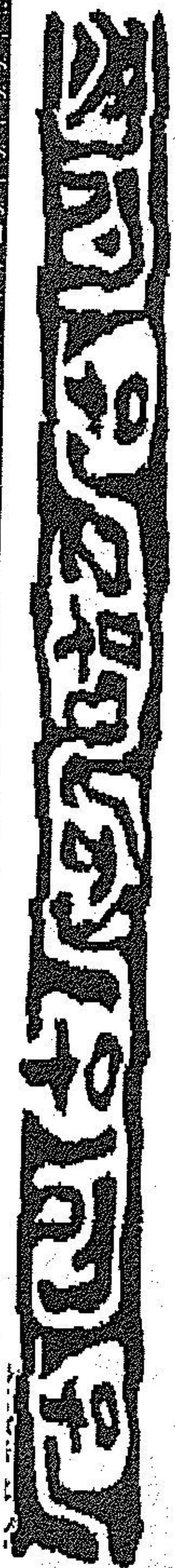
At times Amy chafes under the strain of being different.

"Janey is sitting next to me holding a bowl of steaming chicken noodle soup, just like a TV-commercial mom. But she's not a TV-commercial mom. They don't have families like ours on TV." (p. 138.)

However, it is clear that Amy will not allow herself to be underestimated. She is intelligent and resourceful with clear ideas of her own.

"I feel bad about worrying my father, but angry too. In a way, he forced me into running away to be with Mom. I've been saying that I wanted to spend more time with her since I was in kindergarten. Why didn't Daddy ever listen?" (p. 62)

Living in Secret is entertaining and thought-provoking. As in real life, the questions that it raises have no simple solutions, but because it is written from a child's point of view, these questions are seen in a new light which challenges assumptions of right and wrong, making room for novel solutions to old, and new, problems.



Sistah Action!

Sponsored by Aché and The Box

Thursday, June 24th, 5pm
at the Castro Theatre

This is a true renaissance time for lesbians and gays of color. Over the past ten years we have begun to see a virtual explosion of film/video images of ourselves which we for the first time control. Landmark works, such as Marlon Riggs' "Tongues Untied", have sparked a new generation of filmmakers and cultural warriors who are exploring the myriad of issues facing our communities. From established directors such as Michelle Parkerson, Isaac Julien and Marlon Riggs, to a growing new crop of upcoming young filmmakers including Pratibha Parmar, Cheryl Dunye and Dawn Suggs—the future holds much promise.

On Thursday, June 24th, 5pm at the Castro Theatre, Aché and The Box are the proud sponsors of SISTAH ACTION, a compelling evening of films and videos by lesbians of color hosted by filmmaker Aarin Burch. Following the films will be SISTAH SAID WHAT? — a panel discussion with the filmmakers including Pratibha Parmar, Yvonne Welbon, Desi del Valle, Azian Nurudin, and Dawn Suggs who will talk about their personal motivations and agendas for making media, how they started out, and how they feel about the

programming of their work, moderated by filmmaker Shari Frilot. Join the filmmakers for a reception following the panel discussion, and later on for dancing at The Box. Sponsored by the Laine Family Foundation, Aché and The Box, SISTAH SAID WHAT will take place at 7:30pm moving to UC Berkeley Extension following the film screenings. The panel discussion is free. Don't miss either of these events!!

Films to be screened at SISTAH ACTION include:

Bitter Strength - by Azian Nurudin (1993, 3 min.)

This short film explores the aesthetics of S/M in PixelVision.

A Cosmic Demonstration of Sexuality - by Shari Frilot (1993, 15 sec.)

Cruel - by Desi del Valle (1993, 15 min.)

The story of the effects of violence, homophobia and racism on a Latina lesbian relationship.

Ifé - by Len Keller (1993, 5 min.)

Ifé follows one day in the life of a black French lesbian in San Francisco.

I Never Danced the Way Girls Were Supposed To - by Dawn Suggs (1992, 7 min.) A fresh and funny approach to the question "What makes Black lesbians so special?"

Love Beneath a Noon Sky - by Christina Ray (1993, 3 min.)

Monique - by Yvonne Welbon (1991, 4 min.)

An award-winning autobiographical piece about the filmmakers' first experience with racism.

Monsoon - by Maya Chowdry (1992, 3 min.)

A poetic look at the cycles of women and the cycles of the earth.

The Potluck and The Passion - by Cheryl Dunye (1992, 22 min.)

Safer Sister [PSA #3&4] - by Maria Perez (1992, 30 sec. ea.)

"Safer sex has to be sold. People need to be interested in it before they buy it. I wanted to make this piece sexy and friendly."

Sisters in the Life - by Yvonne Welbon (1993, 23 min.)

An experimental narrative focusing on Donna, a thirtysomething black lesbian who recalls her first experience with platonic love as a fourteen year old.

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To receive a copy of Aché's Resource Guide to Black Lesbian & Gay Film/Video with descriptions and complete distribution information for over 40 works by and about Black Lesbians & Gays, send a SASE to: Aché Media Guide, 3122 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, CA 94705.

View From the Bridge

by Ayofemi Folayan

A speech delivered February 14, 1993 in Long Beach, California at The 1993 Black Gay & Lesbian Leadership Conference "Building Bridges, Making Connections".

You have been here at the Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Conference. You have attended institutes and workshops and banquets and dances. You have been a part of an historic weekend, because this is a new moment in the evolution of the black gay and lesbian community. In this time, when gay and lesbian issues are splashed across the headlines and national attention is focused on African-Americans both around the country and in this city (in the wake of the uprising and the new trial of the police officers whose acquittal ignited those days of rage) we must remember, in those words of Audre Lorde, that "we were never meant to survive." Survival, which many of us take for granted, is not guaranteed. We cannot forget the early victims of the Holocaust who were the gay men and lesbians, the generations of our ancestors whose bodies line the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, the children of our communities whose daily sport is dodging police bullets and batons in America.

You are the ones who made the sacrifice to be here, showed up and were counted. I know I am preaching to the choir when I say that developing leadership, being accountable and accepting the challenges of service in this community are more urgent priorities than ever before. I don't know how far some of you had to come, both in terms of geography and psychology, how deep was the closet whose door you had to open to be here, how big the barrier was to acceptance of yourself

that you had to overcome to be here. I remember when I was still afraid to be visible as a black lesbian. I remember what a hurdle self-acceptance was for me. I know it was a long journey to be "out" around other brothers and sisters, especially when I wasn't sure if you would understand because you were in the closet, too! I remember how ostracized and ashamed I felt when other African-Americans chose to exile me for being a lesbian. Like the familiar pain of racism, it left a festering wound in my heart. I know that we have stood on the banks of the river, watching each other and wanting to reach out and hold on to each other over the rapid rush of water. I know that in my exhaustion and despair, I have sometimes thought that reaching you was impossible.

You have walked across this bridge called my back. You have plodded, with spirit heavy and heart weary on the rough hewn planks of this body, this one being with many aspects that you can't even see. In a world that defiles our love with bitter words and actions, we are gathered here on this day dedicated to love, to define, and to develop connections that will bind us together, that will make an unbreakable chain to hold us and keep us strong in these times. But this is no easy task.

There is an enormous river that rushes and plunges deep below as we start to build our bridge. That river is the source of the energy that we will use to make this bridge a reality, a strong link that reaches from one side

of the river to another. That river is not the ancient river of forgetfulness. It is a river swollen with our history, our memory. Will we baptize ourselves in its abundant flow?



Jackie H. '93

Will we remember the roots from which we come?

I grew up in a family that sharecropped land in Alabama, raised cotton and sold cotton until they could buy back the land from the landlord. My great-grandfather, Patrick Burnett, finally succeeded in buying back that land in 1924. And the white people in that part of Alabama couldn't stand to see him as the proud owner of his land, so they burned his crop. My grandmother and great-aunts used to talk about how he stood and watched the flames ravaging the cotton and

tears rolled down his cheeks. My great-grandfather had worked so hard to get that land back from the landlord, he didn't have anything left when they burned his crop. So he stood there and cried, and when the last wisp of smoke had curled up toward the sky, he went into the house and lay down in his bed and died. He couldn't rise up for another effort. But his children, the men and women of my grandmother's generation, all went on to become strong leaders in their own way.

My great-aunt Ophelia opened a successful general store in Lexington Park, Maryland.

My great-uncle Jim opened a catfish restaurant in Atlanta. My grandmother was one of the first women ordained in the Pentecostal

Assemblies of the World. It was her

example and encouragement that have pushed me to achieve in my own life. It was her sense of fairness that inspired me

to labor in the fields of civil rights and justice. Long before I ever heard of Martin Luther King, Jr. I had been instructed to judge by the content of a person's character rather than the color of their skin.

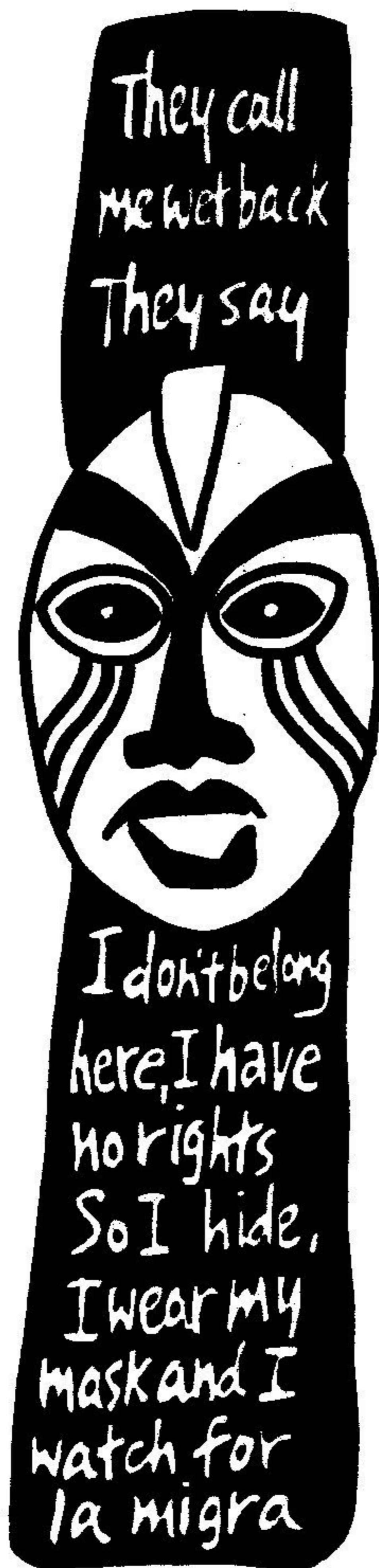
Some of you look up here and see a fat woman on crutches and you want to distance yourself from me, because you believe that this shell, this body defines who I am, what is in my heart. Some of you look at the clothes I wear and pass judgement, whether you think it is too butch, not femme enough, not Afrocentric enough. Some of you are whis-

pering among yourselves about rumors you have heard about me in this community, and I know there are many rumors, but the river rushes beneath us, the waters are flowing fast and furious, swollen by the rains of hatred that have fallen on us. We must go back and cleanse ourselves of the petty differences that keep us on opposite banks, that fill the river with dangerous divisions, like hungry piranhas circling under this bridge.

Building this bridge takes every one of us. We don't have time or room for letting go of anyone. How many willing workers have drowned in the river because of breast cancer and AIDS? I see them floating downstream, out of sight, out of our consciousness. The bridge is our memory, the power to remember what is really most important after all. The bridge is the healing that needs to happen in this community, the respect and honor we need to have for each other. It's time for AIDS workers to realize that breast cancer is killing women at the rate of nearly 50,000 per year. That is also a health crisis in this community. It is time for the revolution to not only be televised, but to be recorded on videotape and distributed to all of us.

You have walked across this bridge called my back. I have felt every one of your steps. It didn't matter if you were wearing hiking boots or five-inch heels, I have felt every one of your steps. You have assumed that I would lay down and be that bridge for your crossing. You have assumed that I would lay down, grab fast to the other bank with my tired hands, and let you walk across the river of our past without any danger. I have been the kind and gentle guide, the clear path across which you could go. I have been the bridge between the leather crowd and the lipstick lesbians. I have been the bridge between the political radicals and the rainbow coalition. I have talked

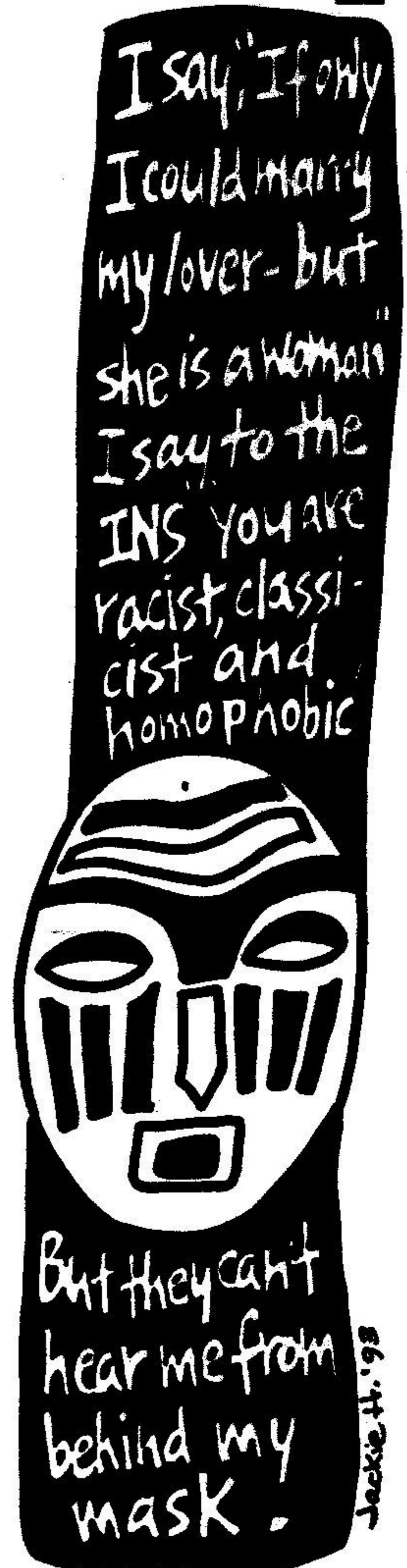
Continued on page 24



FEATURED ARTIST:

JACKIE HILL

"WHEN I CREATE, WHEN I DESIGN, WHEN I SEE SOMETHING THAT MY HANDS HAVE PRODUCED STARING BACK AT ME FROM A CANVAS, A SHEET OF PAPER, I FEEL A VERY STRONG PRESENCE WITH ME. IT IS MY GRANDFATHER, MY FATHER'S FATHER. FROM HIM I RECEIVE THIS WONDROUS, THIS BEAUTIFUL GIFT. THESE EYES OF MINE SEE IN THAT SPECIAL WAY. AND THESE HANDS POSSESS THIS INCREDIBLE POWER THAT SOMETIMES OVERWHELMS ME. MY NAME IS JACKIE AND I AM A 29-YEAR-OLD ARTIST STRUGGLING WITH LIFE'S OBSTACLES (AND THERE ARE MANY) BUT STILL DISCOVERING, EXPLORING AND EXPRESSING MY CREATIVITY."



Jackie H. '98

and nurtured the lines of communication that traverse this bridge, whether you had straight hair, dreadlocks, a natural, or no hair at all. I have stayed here on the banks of the river, even when you chose to hurl stones of gossip and accusation at my back, even when we have disagreed about how to cross the river.

I am a black lesbian feminist with disabilities. Those are treated as dirty words that you don't want to soil your mouth with. I remember when we were colored. I remember when we were Negroes. I remember when black was an insult that could get you punched in the face or worse. I remember the first time I used African-American, and felt the cables of a bridge between here and that Mother Continent from which we all came. I remember when I first stepped on the soil of that Continent and felt myself reaching across oceans to my past. I felt the long, painful journey from Africa to America in that naming of myself as African-American. I remember the stench of those dark holds in which we were chained and forgotten until it was time for us to be paraded on the auction block. I remember the brothers and sisters and cousins and mothers and fathers who died in those ships on the waters of the oceans that are the bridge between Africa and America. I remember the languages that we spoke once with knowledge and pride: the Fulani and Hausa and Mandingo and Ibo and Yoruba long before the tongue of Europe captured our mouths and our minds. I remember the artisans and scholars and griots who captured the history that flows beneath me in the river.

I remember when I was a bulldagger. I remember when lesbian was something white perverted women were. I remember when dyke was a word that meant something hateful that could get you beat up or arrested or worse. I felt the long history of women holding onto other women, forming a human bridge across time in secrets that could not

be revealed in the daylight. I remember Billie Tipton and Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey and all the voices who sang the blues and changed the pronouns in their minds. I remember when Pat Parker and Audre Lorde and Sonya Sanchez and Jewelle Gomez and Angela Davis were names I treasured as writers of my truth as a Black lesbian, and wondered whether I could claim and celebrate them as my own.

I don't have to look back at all to notice how many of you still call my disabilities "handicaps," forgetting that that word implies begging, cap in hand, as a means to survive for those who are disabled. I still feel exiled and excluded when your meetings are held in rooms that are not accessible, when your dances and parties are held in a club with a long flight of stairs at its entrance. While some of you have

increased consciousness of disabilities as a result of the AIDS epidemic, for many of you I remain invisible.

Today is Valentine's Day, a day for lovers, but we are still forgetting to send our love songs to each other across the rivers of tears we have cried in silence. We still forget to make our community a loving accessible place for everyone. Instead, we are still worried about wearing the right clothes, going to the right clubs, being Afrocentric enough, whatever the latest excuse is to keep us apart. I have had relationships with other black lesbians and I have had relationships with white women and Latina women. I don't need any more

community chaperones in my bedroom, telling me which women are acceptable. I don't need anyone looking at me from the outside with judgmental and critical eyes, no



matter what I do. Every time you dive into the river and search for gossip to carry to the other side, you undo the construction on the bridge of community that we need to have between us.

"I am sick and tired of being sick and tired," as Fannie Lou Hamer said. Like her, I struggle with diabetes and lupus and yet I am still here. Earlier this week, I suffered ten seizures in a four-hour span. I was told that I would probably not be able to recover in time to join you this afternoon. I proved them wrong, because I am a bridge. I have solid cable and brick running through me, the unbreakable

fiber of courage and wisdom that I have inherited from my grandmother Catherine and Audre Lorde and Frida Kahlo and Pat Parker and all the others who were not afraid to step boldly into the river. I remember when I was baptized as a child. I was dressed in a black robe with a bathing cap and slippers on and the water was freezing cold, but I had no fear, because I knew I was going into that water full of faith, full of conviction. I could let myself be placed under the water and come up filled with the Holy Ghost, because I knew those waters were filled with love. Like the preacher my grandmother was and I used to be, I stand before you this afternoon and plead for your understanding and compassion, your integrity and commitment to this project. Let mine not be the only voice asking you to change the future by building a more loving present, a more powerful reality based on the willingness to be visible in your communities, to be true leaders, stepping boldly onto the bridge you have built by your example. We have no more time for judgments and exclusions. The river is rising and finishing this bridge is an urgent priority.

I will close with a poem by the other mentor from whom I draw strength, whose words inspire and nurture me to hold on to the other bank, though my hands are tired and my spirit is weary. I met Pat Parker at the first Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Conference, where she read her work at the opening plenary session. She cannot stand here before you this afternoon, but I am sure she would still ask this poetic question, which remains relevant today:

Where Will You Be?

by Pat Parker

Boots are being polished
Trumpeters clean their horns
Chains and locks are forged
The crusade has begun.

Once again flags of Christ

are unfurled in the dawn
and cries of soul saviors
sing apocalyptic on air waves.

Citizens, good citizens all
parade into voting booths
and in self-righteous sanctity
X away our right to life.

I do not believe as some
that the vote is an end,
I fear even more
It is just a beginning.

So I must make an assessment
Look to you and ask:
Where will you be
when they come?

They will not come
a mob rolling
through the streets
but quickly and quietly
move into our homes
and remove the evil,
the queerness,
the faggotry,
the perverseness from their midst.
They will not come
clothed in brown,
and swastikas, or
bearing chest heavy with
gleaming crosses.
The time and need
for ruses are over.
They will come
in business suits
to buy your homes
and bring bodies to
fill your jobs.
They will come in robes
to rehabilitate
and white coats
to subjugate
and where will you be
when they come?

Where will we all be
when they come?
And they will come.

they will come
because we are
defined as opposite—
perverse

and we are perverse.

Every time we watched
a queer hassled in the
streets and said nothing—
It was an act of perversion.

Every time we lied about
the boyfriend or girlfriend
at coffee break—
It was an act of perversion.

Everytime we heard,
"I don't mind gays
but why must they
be blatant?" and said nothing—
It was an act of perversion.

Everytime we let a lesbian mother
lose her child and did not fill
the courtrooms—
It was an act of perversion.

Everytime we let straights
make out in our bars while
we couldn't touch because
of laws—
It was an act of perversion.

Everytime we put on the proper
clothes to go to a family
wedding and left our lovers
at home—
It was an act of perversion.

Everytime we heard
"Who I go to bed with
is my personal choice—
It's personal not political"
and said nothing—
It was an act of perversion.

Everytime we let straight relatives
bury our dead and push our
lovers away—
It was an act of perversion.

And they will come.
They will come for
the perverts
& it won't matter
if you're
homosexual, not a faggot
lesbian, not a dyke
gay, not queer

It won't matter
if you
own your business
have a good job
or are on S.S.I.

It won't matter
if you're
Black
Chicano
Native American
Asian
or White

It won't matter
if you're from
New York
or Los Angeles
Galveston
or Sioux Falls

It won't matter
if you're
Butch, or Femme
Not into roles
Monogamous
Non-monogamous

It won't matter
if you're
Catholic
Baptist
Atheist
Jewish
or M.C.C.

They will come
They will come
to the cities
and to the land
to your front rooms
and in your closets.

They will come for
the perverts
and where will
you be
When they come?

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"As Black women, as Lesbians and feminists there is no guarantee that our lives will ever be look at with the kind of respect given to certain people from other races, sexes or classes. There is similarly no guarantee that we or our movement will survive long enough to become safely historical. We must document ourselves now."

*Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith,
Conditions 5(1979)*

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S/M: Sexual Deviance or Sexual Freedom

by Samiya A. Bashir

To deal with S/M in a Black, lesbian context has proven a many tiered task. Trying to find information pertinent to the subject is much like the time when, entrenched in the Gay & Lesbian community and liberation movement, I realized all of a sudden that I was surrounded by white folks. All of the people of color, especially the sisters, were taking back seats and secretarial work, myself included. Realizing that "The" Gay and Lesbian community was as colorless as any mainstream community was disconcerting, though I shouldn't have been surprised. Just as I shouldn't have been surprised when I found that most everything written about lesbian S/M practices was written by white women (and men!) Just as I shouldn't have been surprised when exploring the S/M scene as a novice, baby dyke, I noticed that the most visible women in the scene were...you guessed it, white women.

Now this may lead some to believe that there are no Black women involved in the S/M scene, or that—as this is too often the only way you may see them—they are all slaves to some white woman. But, really, that's like the time a young, straight, Ethiopian man told me that there were no homosexuals in Africa—Please!

Many folks have a rather large problem with S/M. Some of the roots of their problems may have valid points for some people. But as with anything sexual there are different strokes for different folks. Audre Lorde said about the subject, "S/M is not the sharing of power, it is merely a depressing replay of the old destructive dominant/subordinate mode of human relating and one-sided power..." ("Letter to the Editor," *Gay Community News*; 7:37, 1980) We cannot deny that these power relations exist in our daily social lives; we also cannot deny that we, as lesbians of color, are deemed virtually powerless in the hierarchy of the social structure. The difference is in how each individual deals with this realization. Some sisters find that playing with these power roles gives them back some of the control over the power dynamics in their lives that the dominant society takes from them everyday.

This is also clearly evidenced in the role playing which we see with women who identify themselves as Butch or Femme. These roles are clearly defined and mirror the Dominant and Submissive roles of S/M exactly with difference being only in degree. Of course many lesbian/feminists find a great many problems with even these relatively

tame role definitions.

Most of the people with whom I have come into contact who are into S/M are very educated in matters of power dynamics, consensuality and trust...not to mention anatomy. A woman with whom I spoke on the subject told me that, for her, it was a progressive act. She mentioned the different levels of empowerment she felt from her gender, from her lesbianism, and from the freedom to take control of her sexual fantasies.

Any discussion of S/M always goes back to the issue of trust. You can't become involved with someone, give up your power to them, give up your body to them, if you don't trust them; at least that is the ideal behind S/M. Having a lover to whom you can give your total trust and control, or who will turn over, for a period of time, their control into your hands, can be an extremely healing process in a world where our power, what little of it exists, is negated by society daily.

It is around the idea of taking control in our private lives of the power dynamics prescribed for us by society, of which we have no veritable control, that S/M lies. We all have power issues, and to deny that is a real sidestepping of the issue. To take from our sisters, or further ostracize them from what is often the only community in which they really feel at home, that of other Sister Lesbians, does an injustice to those women. It serves only to divide and fragment our already fragile community. Our late sister Audre Lorde also told us

that we need to celebrate our differences; see them as strengths. For those of us who are Black, women and lesbians in a white,

male dominated world finding strengths in our differences, which are many, is the ultimate act of resistance and solidarity.

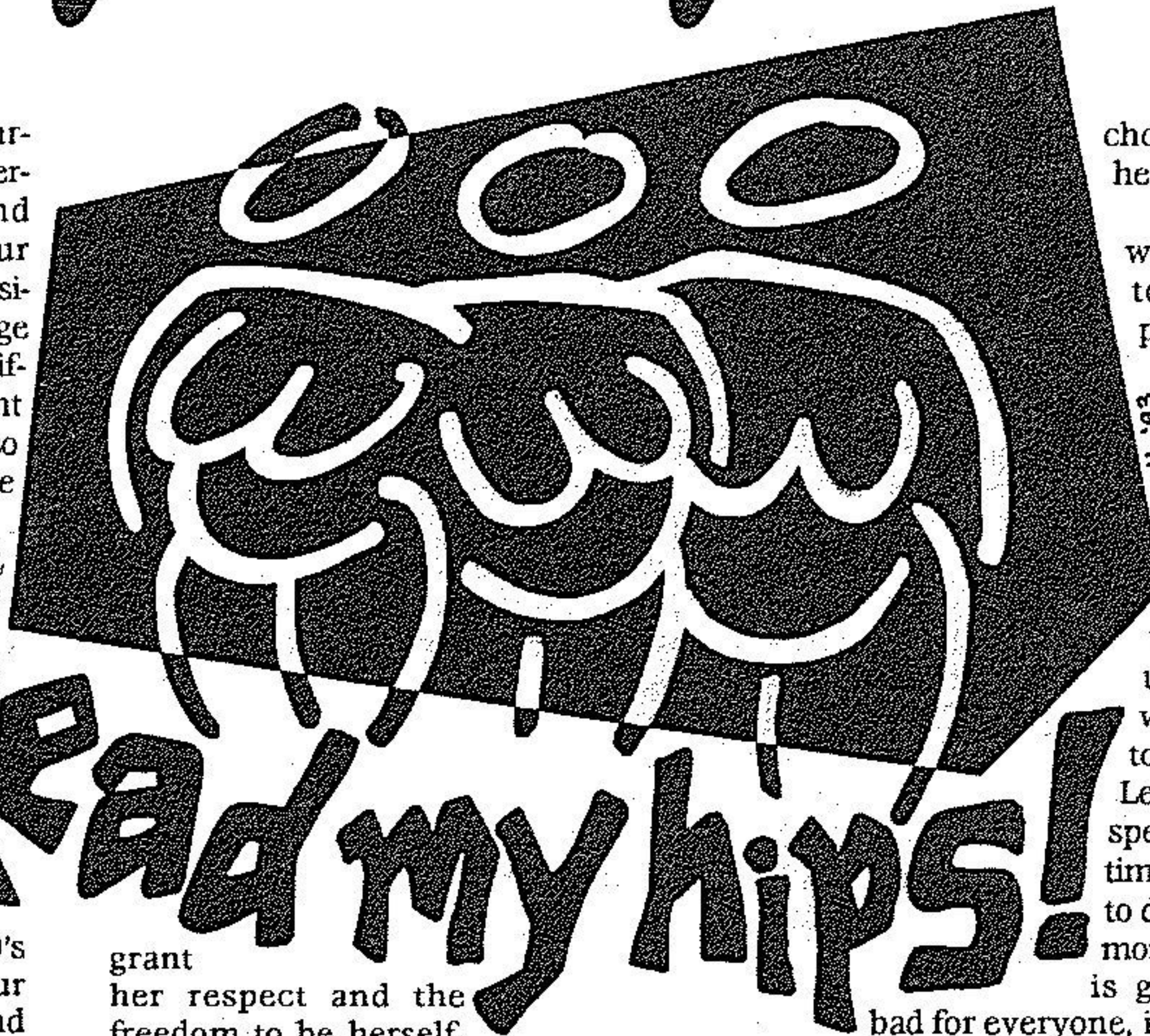


Thoughts on Judgement

by Aina Herbert

In the storm of controversy surrounding bisexuality, S/M, interracial couplings, and non-monogamy it's often our first impulse to note our current position, justify it, and then challenge or censor the womyn who are in different spaces, choosing different paths. This form of judging seems so logical and natural, we hardly give it thought.

As easily as we judge each other, we accept that our society will judge us as well. We work towards being freed of our disapproving judgement and awarded a go ahead, a "stamp of approval." As I think about recent history I develop a sense of deja-vu. When we fought to end segregation and bigotry during the 50's and 60's we were silenced by our brothers who wanted our backs and our brains—because of their own homophobia and their fear that strong, visible African-American lesbians would be unacceptable to the larger society (from whom we were soliciting a benevolent judgement!) Disillusioned as we were, most of us accepted our censored role in order to work for the good of the whole—only to find ourselves, in 1992, baby steps from where black lesbians were in 1942. Now the same cycle is being repeated within the lesbian community. We are unsure of our right to be accepted for all of the things we are—working class, wealthy, sadistic, centered, brilliant, psychotic, married to each other with a dog and a Hibachi or spending four nights a week at the club. But we do have that right. We do not need to change our sister's state of mind or values or personal choices in order to



grant her respect and the freedom to be herself. What's more, we will only hurt ourselves if we silence her in an effort to look as we imagine our oppressors would like us to. I'm not saying that we must approve of everyone, because positive judgements are not much more helpful than negative judgements. For instance, if you tell me that you approve of me because I am involved in a long term relationship with another African-American woman, unlike some sisters who don't take relationships seriously and spend all of their time in bars, I would think, "well, before I met Denise, I was in love with a white woman, and the only reason I don't go out anymore is that I don't have the time! Would she have accepted me three years ago? Does she really accept me now, or only if I stay within the value system she has

chosen for herself?"

I would like to propose a radical, but far from original, way for us to work together. Let's stop spending time trying to decide if monogamy is good or

bad for everyone, if dating non African-American womyn is right or wrong for all of us. Let's simply decide what's right for ourselves, and let's let our sisters decide what's right for them. And after that let's give each other room to explore and change our minds because, strangely enough, the most effective way to present a united front is to give each other unconditional support and sensitivity. And along that same line, if we respect one another's uniqueness of circumstances, personality and self-expression, we will create safe space for all of us and for the ones to come.

Aina Herbert is a 19-year-old poet from Cleveland, Ohio. When she is not boring her lover with unanswerable questions, she is singing Broadway show tunes at top volume.

Monogamy

by J.L. Vest

Most women want to find soulmates. Many of us want to raise children. Many of us want to lead stable, quiet lives and we think that monogamy is a prerequisite for such blessings. Our society in general and the lesbian community specifically idealizes monogamy, shuns any alternative to it, and is at the same time unwilling to critically analyze the reasons for the creation of this monogamy model. While it is true that some couples enter into monogamous unions which are healthy and positive affirmations of their love, many of us do not. Many of us have motives for our choice of monogamous lifestyles which need to be questioned.

NIn theory, a person can only be monogamous or non-monogamous, but in reality there is a wide spectrum of practices which end up getting classified as one or the other. For example there is serial monogamy. A person only sleeps with one person at a time, but changes from one person to the next very frequently. Then there's virtual monogamy, you know, I agree not to sleep around but I do anyway but you don't know it so we're still monogamous, right? Then of course there's public monogamy. For the sake of the community, we're together and we're faithful. In reality you slept around on me and I slept around on you or we agreed to both go experiment but we want everyone to think we're faithful otherwise they'll think we're not happy or that we have loose morals or perverse tastes.

I propose that the only kind of monogamy which should occur is spontaneous monogamy; the kind that occurs when two people have a

sexual relationship and decide not to interact sexually with any other persons because they have no desire to. Monogamy for any other reason is deception.

Even though we're lesbians and theoretically our very existence constitutes a challenge to existing prescriptions on female sexuality, many of us, even the most "politically correct, non-role-playing, progressive, womanist" types tend to subscribe to traditional patriarchal definitions of our sexual expression. Most of us are not willing to admit to this. Even in the same breath that we call some woman a "ho" we rave about the sexual freedom that we, as lesbians, enjoy. And who are the "hos"? The non-monogamous of course.

We perceive non-monogamous relationships as superficial, unfulfilling, selfish, lustful, individualistic, immoral, perverse, and as diverging from the norm or the ideal which is monogamy. Monogamy should not be the standard by which we measure all other relationships. But it oftentimes is.

So many of us commit to some form of monogamy despite the fact that it does not feel comfortable or fulfilling. We do it out of a sense of obligation and out of a need to fit the bill of a "good girl." Whores sleep around. Women who cannot get a steady, committed lover sleep around. We can get someone to care for us. Women who are interested in sex for sex's sake sleep around. We are not so lusty. We have morals. We have discipline. We are not whores.

We believe so strongly in the contract we call monogamy that we often sign it without reading the fine print.

Contracts have a way of being filled with conditions. This is the nature of many monogamous relationships. I will love you if you love me. I will love you if you love no other. I will love you if you only sleep with me. The best evidence for the deceptive pretexts under which many monogamy contracts are signed is the amount of "cheating" that goes on. People sign contracts they cannot keep and break hearts and forfeit friendships in the process. We need to question the commitments we make before we make them.

Many of us are interested in monogamy because of the control we feel it grants us. In the same way that heterosexual marriage constitutes a contract, a financial and legal contract, we also, as lesbians, take out contracts on each others' bodies when we take lovers.

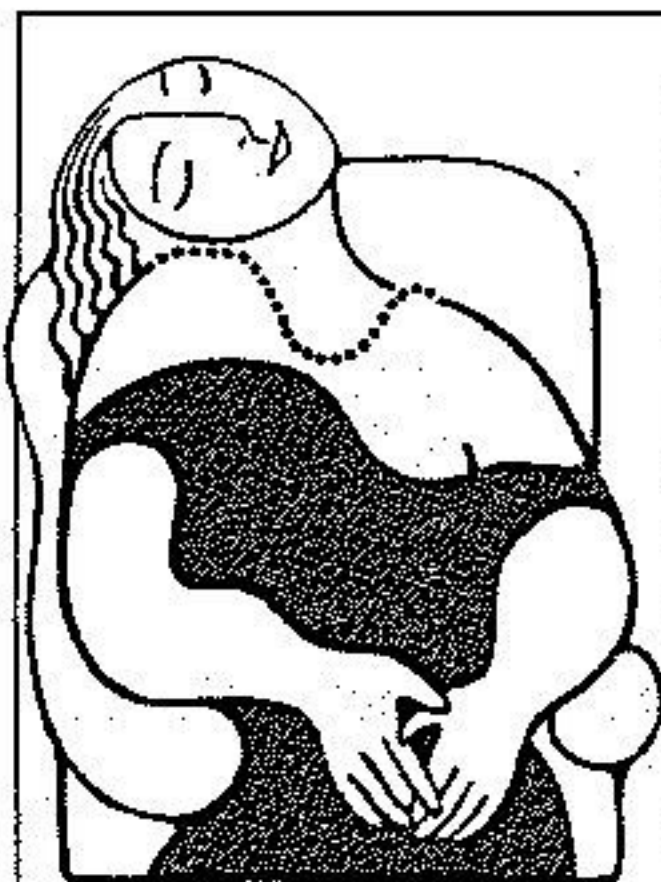
We're taught in this materialistic country to value ourselves by our possessions so we come to view the people in our lives, our children and our lovers, as our possessions. Traditionally women have been seen as possessions of men. Women continue to be portrayed in the media and in advertising as objects. Not just sex objects but objects

that one possesses. And one elevates oneself and one's status by owning a woman. Unfortunately many lesbians have adopted the same ideological structure so that when they date a woman, she's their woman. They own this woman, they own her body, and the way they define their ownership over that body is through monogamy. You know, she is mine, in other words she sleeps with nobody but me. Nobody has access to her body, or more specifically, her pussy, but me. It's mine and that's the definition of ownership. She's my girlfriend, my woman, my lover. Hands off. No rights. My rights.

We see making love as "getting into someone's pants" or "giving it up," or having it "given up" to us. It is a type of barter or exchange. In order for two people to make love they must give each other access to their bodies. This is a big deal, this granting of access. So big that women often attach conditions to the granting and that's where you have these conflicts. I love you but... I don't want you to do what you want to do if it's not what I want you to do. I love you but... only if you love me the way I love you. I love you...only if you'll be my

woman. I love you ...only if you'll be monogamous.

We all need to question ourselves about the decisions we make about ourselves and the judgments we make about others. We need to be monogamous when it feels good to us and we need to know why we feel good about it. We need to make commitments which will enrich our lives and not commitments of obligation. We need to be concerned about the commitments that others make only to the extent that it is beneficial to the well-being and mutual growth of the persons involved. I think that if we were really interested primarily in having a positive exchange with someone wherein they grew and we grew, we expressed our love and they expressed their love and we also expressed the other feelings we had, there would be no room in that kind of relationship for possession, there would be no room for control or ownership. There would be no room for societal definitions of our loving. There would only be room for joy and splendor, spiritual inspiration, passion, kindness, beauty, and love. Monogamously or non-monogamously.



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A Prayer For My Woman

by Adrienne Y. Nelson

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 my shepherd
 she is
 my lover
 pat pat
 of heavy
 thighs
 i shall
 not want
 i need her
 can i get
 a witness
 he leadeth me
 in the paths
 of righteousness
 hand clappin'
 we walk
 together
 foot stompin'
 beside the
 still waters
 he maketh me
 lie down
 with her
 my cup
 runneth over

hallelujah!
 he restoreth
 my soul
 sing sing
 i will fear
 no evil
 bearing only
 good fruit
 preacher preach
 thank you
 jesus
 for thou art
 with me
 as we walk
 through the
 valley
 in the
 shadows
 i will
 love her
 until the
 day i die
 Amen.

*Adrienne lives and works in the
 Los Angeles area.*



THIS TIME: AN OPEN LETTER TO GOD

by Leigh A. Mosley

This time
we will eat the bullets
that rain
we will drink the blood
that pours.
When our children call
our names a thousand
miles away,
we will come.

This time
we will have our children
come home laughing
and if every generation
has its war,
this time
will be the last time.

This time
Death will be disallowed.
We will not sacrifice
the sacred cow
or our children for profit.

Even you gave Abraham a
second chance...

*Leigh lives and works in
Detroit, Michigan*

THE GARDEN

POEM

by Cara Page

Mama asked me	into her garden?
Are you gonna move to her garden?	And I said, Yes.
I said, Mama	Her garden of full ripe red tomatoes
You mean her garden of	plump and juicy off the vine
coffee beans and rice	cool peppermint
cassava and yams	zesty onions/brown round
planted so tender and so right.	bodied squash
You mean those hot red peppers	peaches and plums
bell and yella peppers too.	drippin sticky sweetness free
That thick sweet, sweet corn	
and ripe, plump, juicy cherry tree	I said Mama,
Yes, Mama	Yes, Mama.
that's the garden for me.	That garden
	time after wet, full
Mama asked me,	wet, full harvest time
Are you gonna move	is for me.



fake smiles
and hugs
from women who claim
you are not ashamed
to be named
Black lesbian and proud
and you yell it loud
in a crowd
of racists and -phobes
for them to hear
you make it clear
that you are here
to stay forever

fake hellos
and how have you beens
from women who swear
you want to share
true sisterhood
and wear
badges of camaraderie
with yourselves and with me
when all you really offer
is artificiality
superficiality
and call it bonding

fake embraces
and where are my sisters
from women who need
to take the lead
as you fight to free
humanity
from all oppression
get stuck in intellectualization
contemplation
of how to make the world

a better place
where sex and race
and the look of a woman's face
do not determine
our value

fake kisses
and we must take care of each
other
from women who dare
to say you care
about yourselves and me
but you run like hell
if all is not swell
and i begin to wail
because my pain
is cutting deep
i cannot sleep
cause my sisters after all
do not heed my call
i'm trying not to fall
into the pit
of apathy and disgust
where i'll lose all trust
in you
my sisters
forever

fake handshakes
and i need you in my life
from women living your politics
and the rhetoric you practice
up to the same damn tricks
you forget how to feel
emotions once real
now have grown old
hearts turned to cold

don't hear when you're told
to not just preach
as you teach
in any given speech
about the world's woes
separating friends from foes
but to hear your sister's pain
there is more to gain
in true sisterhood
here

fake warmth
and good to see you's
from women who constantly
speak of a community
where unity
is the key
but i fail to see
how fakery
and emotional sacrifice
can build anything nice
that's not frozen as ice
for i will
not kill
my humanness
for your political correctness
and lose my heart
watch you tear me apart
just because i cry
and do not lie
about the shit flying by
from women too afraid
to let your feelings stay
where they belong
and see this as strong
not something wrong





and to be hidden

fake smiles
and hugs

from women who deceive
those who want to believe
that true closeness can be
achieved

in our community

but this is not the case
because the heart gets erased
so my message is clear
for all to hear

if we're not supposed
to be close

then let's stop pretending
and put an ending
to spending

so much energy
on claiming to be
more than heady
political buddies
and admit it

that we are full of shit
of the first degree
because we cannot see
that we're a bunch of Black
queers

who hide in fear
behind rhetoric and right action
and common sense
of love
and true connection

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Is You Is or Is You Ain't....

A Real Black Woman?

by Cara Page

<p>I want to/talk/to you about/goddesses/that don't come winged or golden haloed/She comes with her arm extended/ to the sky/with a vision with a dream/that imprints itself/on generations of struggle of strength of us She/comes/like a dance like a wind like a fire</p> <p>She comes in/the body/of my Sisters/ My Sisters/who define themselves/for themselves building worlds and places/for other selves/ amongst the other things that we do/</p>	<p>picking up/and laying down the truth of/you/ the/you/that comes in high yella or shades of dark brown She doesn't come in one color she comes in a sound/that whispers on tongues of liberation/and reinvention a celebratory dance/with the dimension of a universe/ she doesn't come in one body/ one mold/one movement/ she looks/she feels she touches/she sounds off the birthing of freedom...</p> <p>(April 1992 – excerpt from a multimedia piece)</p> <p><i>Cara Page is an African- Polish-Czechoslovakian les- bian. She is a performance artist residing in Oakland, CA.</i></p>
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THAT MULATTO TALK

By Jennifer Lisa Vest

You can talk alotta things
 To black folk
 But you can't talk about
 Being biracial
 Mulatto
 Métis
 Mélange
 Zebra/halfwhite/lightskin
 Good hair
 Slut Mulatto bitch

NO
 It's talking suicide
 To exhibit Mulatto pride

And instead
 We're supposed
 To spend our lives
 Hiding our white parents
 And be obviously and
 politely
 Ashamed in public
 Of our mongrel blood.
 And we just better hope
 We can pass for black
 And make sure we don't
 Have any non-black
 Friends or lovers

And don't ever

Question anyone
 Who says
 Interracial dating
 Is sick and wrong
 And we better
 Talk black
 And walk black
 And be black
 Even if they don't let us
 (cause they never let us)

And we're not supposed to
 Question
 The way everyone
 Questions us
 All the time
 As to our legitimacy
 (cause maybe we really
 ain't black enuf)
 And don't let us be caught
 Having sympathy
 For any bourgeois, I mean
 Oreo black folks
 And
 For God's sake
 Don't ever
 Let us
 Open our mouths
 And say
 Something serious

About how
 Being half
 Of something
 We're supposed to be
 And being wholly
 (And unacceptably)
 Mixed
 Is hard.

Because
 If we just shut
 Our mouths and don't
 Talk that Mulatto talk
 They might let us be
 Even if
 They'll never let us
 Be
 Who we are.

*Jennifer Lisa Vest is an African
 Seminole German Norwegian
 poet/artist living in Oakland.
 She recently moved from
 Washington, D.C. and is seeking
 submissions for her upcoming
 collection The Fourth World:
 An Anthology of Writings by
 Women of Mixed Heritage.*



FICTION

MISS

WORD

by Renita Lynnet Martin

That familiar glance that screamed, "I'm gone beat yo butt after church!" - that glance that scared me enough to momentarily desist my uncontrollable giggling, shuffling, and turning *all the way* around to see who was coming in - was not needed. Miss Betsy had spoken. Although my tender eight-year-old mind didn't know all the details, I had heard folks talk. I knew enough to understand that every Sunday when Miss Betsy asked the Lord not to move her mountain, but, give her the strength to climb, she wasn't speaking of literal mountains. First of all, there were no mountains in Terry, and secondly, her grandson, Jr., was, at 20, a mountain in himself. Every Sunday, my curious energy was for fifteen minutes, focused on Miss Betsy's words. This particular Sunday was different. I knew that when Miss Betsy said, "Lawd, the mountain is too high, I's too tired to climb, I believe you gone have to move it." something was going to change. By nightfall, Jr. was dead, shot three times in a juke joint brawl, killed instantly.

Miss Betsy didn't play.

Years later, as she peeked from behind the screen door, I found myself unable to remove my eyes

from the little "rolly polly" that had managed to get stuck in one of the cracks in Miss Betsy's porch. "Chile, you gone stand there looking retarded? Or you gone act like you got some home trainin and 'least say 'hello.'" I smiled nervously and hugged her.

Once old times, gossip, and iced tea had been consumed, I quickly gave her the ten dollars we had agreed upon. She handled the crumpled bill as if she knew that in it rested my life. Carefully laying it on the table, she joked, "Mind reading gone cost you ten mo dollars."

The tears came fast and hard, choking, almost drowning me as my silence had for so long done. A glass of water, a suffocating embrace, and a roll of tissue passed before I could utter the words, "Fix me." I later learned that the fleeting look of disappointment in her tired eyes was not in the thought that I had gone and gotten myself "big," but that I wanted to be fixed, and that I wanted her to fix me.

The irony and humor in her misinterpretation of the words "fix me" gave me the courage to utter the truth that had, for a lifetime, been my prison. From comic relief flowed the taboo. And in the musk-sweet air of a south from which I had





fled, I found myself telling this Old, Christian, Black Woman that for all my trying, in all my denying, through all my fasting, after all my praying, I could not love any brother the way I loved the sister down the street; that if I chopped off my toes, they wouldn't cease to curl in the presence of a beautiful woman.

As I had anticipated, she grabbed her Bible. However, the traditional verse— that had taken out of context, —rebuked me; left in, confused me—was not the one she read.

In everything give thanks to God for it is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

She read, then carefully lifted

the ten dollar bill from the table and secured it between the wrinkled yellowing pages of her Bible. Placing the Bible in my hands, and my fingers firmly around it, she said, "The only mountains God moves is those that don't be and won't let you be. Mountains that be can only be climbed. You came here "fixed," now go find the strength to climb."

As I walked down the road clutching Miss Betsy's word, the fear was no less, the pain in struggle, still to come. However, I found a sweet joy in not forcing my toes - which automatically curled as the girl down the street greeted me - to "straighten out."

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Keeping.....Secrets

by Blake C. Aarens

Plain hot water in the bathtub. No bubble bath. No epsom salts either, though I have aches and pains enough to warrant it. I don't light candles; this isn't a celebration but a cleansing, and I'm in need of a deep cleansing.

"I have got to stop doing this," I say out loud.

The heat of the water turns the room into a steam bath. I've wrapped my dreadlocks into a bundle on the top of my head, but sweat still falls into my eyes, mingling with the tears already there. And stinging. I reach for the peppermint soap. The movement makes the water swirl about my body and I feel scalded. Masochist that I am, I move some more.

My nipples are sore from Carl's sucking. I rub my forearms across them and shudder with the sensation. But my thoughts are of Denise. My thoughts are always of her. Even in Carl's arms she is all that I can think of. Denise. My best friend. Married to Carl these past fifteen years.

I wonder if her nipples get as stiff and sore as mine. Her lips chapped and bruised from too much kissing? Her cunt moist and aching?

"I have to stop doing this," I repeat. I pour the soap onto the washcloth and drag it across my skin.

"I will take that job in San Francisco," I vow. But the thought of leaving my beloved Denise forms a knot in my stomach. I rub my belly and moan, knowing that this situation, this mess, is of my own making.

The doorbell rings. Naked and dripping water everywhere, I run

from the tub to my bedroom to see who's there. I clear a circle on the fogged window. Denise. No coat on. Hand on her hip, her right foot tapping spasmodically, she stares down at the cracks in the icy sidewalk. I throw on my robe and rush down the stairs to the door, eager to once again soothe whatever hurt has gotten hold of her.

I fling the door open and extend my arms to embrace her; she is as stiff and unyielding as a tree trunk. I pull back to check her expression. She eyes me suspiciously.

"I have known some two-faced women in my time, but you top them all," Denise says, brushing past me and on into my living room.

I follow in a daze, knowing but not knowing what's going on.

"What's the matter, Denise?" I ask in a soothing tone.

"Don't play innocent with me!"

Her auburn hair jerks wildly as she screams at me. I want to touch it.

"Will you please tell me..." I start, but she doesn't let me finish. She raises her arm and throws something at me. I duck too late. The softness of the impact surprises me. I dart out my hand to catch the object before it falls to the floor. My panties. Half of a set she gave me for my birthday last year. Unmistakably mine. 'Joan' embroidered on the front in purple.

I turn away from her, the tension of keeping secrets beginning to drain away. One down, one to go, I think to myself. Denise grabs my shoulder and spins me back around to face her. She quickly takes her hand away.

"How could you do this to me?" she yells, "Is this your idea of best friends!" Then the armor of her anger cracks and she collapses sobbing into my rocking chair.



I want to go to her, to put my arms around her and stroke her hair, to kiss the hot tears from her cheeks, to love her and keep her with me for the rest of my life.

Instead, I sit gingerly on the edge of my couch and force myself to witness the pain that I have caused her. I can't blink the tears away fast enough, can't breathe, can't trust myself to speak. I know what I want to say, but I don't think she's in any mood to hear it. I choke out a few sobs just to keep from

exploding. The sound makes her look up.

"What do you have to cry about? It's not your best friend that's been fucking

your husband!"

I can't bear the anger in her voice; or the way her eyes look through me to the wall. The coldness there has all but eradicated the heat of my bath. I cover my face with my hands. I open my mouth to beg her forgiveness, but that's not what comes out.

"I love you so much...I only slept with Carl to be close to you." From the moment I say it, I begin to know calm.

"What did you say?" I hear the rocker stop. I hold my breath. The air seems electrified. "I asked you a question," Denise says.

"I only slept with him because that's as close as I ever thought I'd get to sleeping with you." That's twice I've said it, but I still can't look at her.

"And you planned to go on like this indefinitely?"

"I didn't have a plan. I just knew I couldn't talk to you about my feelings."

"And how did you know that!"

Her question interrupts the flow of my thoughts. I look up at her. Eyes blazing, hands gripping the armrests, she is fiercely rocking back and forth in my Bentwood rocker.

"I—I—"

"What if you'd gotten pregnant? Or he'd decided he was 'in love' and expected you to marry him? Would you have told me then?"

Staring at my own lap I mumble, "I don't know."

I hear her stop rocking again. When she speaks, her voice is calm, detached.

"One minute you say you love me, the next minute you don't know what's going on. And I'm supposed to believe that you really care?"

"Yes." She doesn't say anything in response so I figure since I'll probably never see her again I'll prove to her that I mean what I say.

"Every time he kissed me, all I could see was your mouth, your tongue, the freckles on your lower lip." I glance up just long enough to see her hand go up to her mouth, as if trying to cover the three dark brown spots we both know are there.

She doesn't speak, so I continue.

"And every time he touched me, I pictured his hand in that gorgeous hair of yours, on your neck, your shoulders, sliding down the length of your arm. When his mouth was on my breast, I swear I could feel the fullness of yours. I'd mimic his sucking, mouthing air but fantasizing your breast there. I pictured your nipples getting hard, warmth spreading across your body as it spread across mine. And when he was inside me—"

"Stop it!"

"—I wanted to leave some of me on him so that the next time he was inside you, I'd be there."

I don't realize she's gotten up until she grabs hold of my dreds and yanks my head back. I stare up at her, knowing the longing is plain on my face. It's too much; I close my eyes.

"Look at me," she demands.

Slowly, I open my eyes. The look on her face is angry, then reproachful, then surprisingly it softens into tenderness. Her mouth falls open. I can no longer hold back the tears. They run down my face and pool in my ears.

"You've kept this from me for ten years."

I nod. She loosens her grip on my dreds.

"Oh, Joan..."

Placing her hands on either side of my face, she wipes my tears away with her thumbs and draws me up into her kiss. Her mouth tastes vaguely of chocolate, and the citrus astringency of champagne. No, Asti Spumante, for the taste is sweet. I lick the inside of her mouth, run my tongue across her teeth, suck hard on her bottom lip, almost as full as my own. I want this kiss to last forever.

But it doesn't. Gasping for air Denise breaks from me. The look on her face is clearly one of astonishment. "All this passion for me?" she says in awe, then smiles that crooked smile of hers.

She caresses my throat, the fingers of her right hand searching for my pulse. When she finds it she plants a light kiss there, and I can't

help but lean my body into her lips.

I don't want gentleness. I want her to grab me and press my body into hers, bite my neck, bruise my lips with her own, mark me up so that later, when she's gone, I can trace the path she makes across my body and remember.

"Denise?" I say.

"Yes?" She lifts her head from my neck and looks into my eyes.

"Just fuck me," I whisper, "Fuck me hard."

I watch as her green eyes widen and her nostrils flare. She runs her tongue across her lips and lets out a noise that sounds just like a low growl. I feel it travel up my spine. She slips her thumbs inside the collar of my robe and pulls it off me, then steps back to look at me.

"You've been bathing," she says.

"Yes."

She comes close to smell me, sniffing at my neck, in my armpits, between my breasts. I try to keep my back from arching as her mouth grazes my nipple, but I can't.

"My, aren't you eager," she chuckles.

I nod.

She looks up at me as her mouth closes over my nipple. I stare at the shiny lipstick marks her pink lips leave on my brown skin. I close my eyes to concentrate on the sensations: her fingers kneading the small of my back, her soft hair brushing my belly, her mouth finally on my breast. Sucking. But she stops.

"Oh, no," she says, "you've gotta look at me. I want you to be perfectly clear as to whose mouth is on you. And whose hands."

And with that, she drops to her knees and slides her hand, without ceremony, between my legs. "My, my, my," she gasps.

My hips are already moving in time to her slow, teasing rhythm when she asks, "You want me?"

"Yes."

"Yes, who?"

"Denise. Yes, Denise. I want you."

"Is all this wetness for me?" she asks.

"Yes, Denise, all for you."

"Then I'm gonna take it."

I breathe through clenched teeth and cling to her shoulders as she inserts first one, then two, then three fingers into my watering vagina.

"You're so wet," she breathes, and kisses my thighs.

I throw my head back and fuck myself on Denise's hand.

"Don't you close your eyes," she warns me.

"I won't; I promise."

I bring my head forward and look down at her kneeling in front of me: hand buried between my legs, skirt riding up on her hips, her stockings and garters just barely visible. I rock back and forth on her hand, almost letting her fingers slip out of me before thrusting forward again. My legs start shaking uncontrollably and she withdraws her hand. I nearly fall. I clench and unclench the muscles of my cunt hoping like a magnet to draw her fingers back inside.

"Joan?"

"Yes," I sob.

"I'm thirsty," she says and pushes at me until I stumble backward onto my couch.

In one movement she throws my knees over her shoulders and puts her mouth where her hand had been. She licks me with long, slow strokes. And with quick darts of her tongue. She sucks on my clit like it's a straw, and nibbles on it until I doubt if I'll ever be able to walk again. And I don't care. Then her hand is at me again, her fist demanding entrance. The pressure, the resistance, and then the pop as she gets past my barriers. The fullness. Oh, Goddess, the fullness. She pumps me hard and fast, and I come. Naked and writhing on my couch, with her fist buried deep inside me, I call her name over and over again.

"Denise. Denise. Oh, Denise."



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by E. Jones

Summer sounds poured through my window with the oppressive July heat. Through the symphony of crickets, children's laughter, and sirens in the distance, I thought of my history; a history molded to incite guilt, confusion, and conformity.

I was sometimes mistaken for a boy. It didn't help matters any that my hair was very short, and, forever nappy. Dolls, playing house, and all the other games designed for young girls had very little space in my life. But when it came to catching a football, or playing basketball, I was as good, or better, than most of the boys in my neighborhood. Because of this, I was labeled "tomboy," i.e. outcast; for the culture set up for young girls not only bored me, but didn't come nearly as natural as playing sports; which was designed for the boys, and meant to exclude me. So, I timidly braced myself and did what came natural, and, with that, absorbed the question not meant for my ears; "Is that a boy or a girl?" The question always hit me like a ton of bricks. The implications that I could never articulate, nevertheless, caused shame and guilt.

It wasn't until much later in life when I met Pam that I understood why being thought a boy, or being called "tomboy" frightened me so. Even at eleven when I would tell my nine-year old brother to tell different girls how pretty they were, and how much their body parts excited him, I, and he, ignored the obvious. But I knew, instinctively, the blasphemy associated with my attraction to women, and uttering any

words of affection to them was equal to the highest sin. So, until I met Pam, during my first year of college, I forced myself into a world of confusion and conformity that was as awkward as a baby's first steps.

After Pam and I became friends, she told me she was a lesbian and was attracted to me. "We can still be friends," I said, "but I'm straight."

"Well, what do you think about that?" she asked.

"I think it's your business, and people have a right to live their life as they see fit." Oh, such denial. I believed every word I said, or I wanted to believe it.

Wasn't it I who held my cousin around the waist and tried to kiss her when we were kids? And I would have, if she hadn't resisted. My freshman year of high school I cried every day over two of the senior girls on the basketball team. My older sister would say, "What, are you in love with them?" How could I have known it was like any other high-school crush? With a twist.

Some nights Pam would stay over at my apartment, and we'd go to class together the following morning. One particular night while we were studying and laughing, she leaned over the table and kissed me. It was like the sun shining after a lifetime of cloudiness. We became lovers. I found a best friend, lover, and sister, all in one person. I discovered a new world hidden behind walls of ignorance and shame. A world that we so often deny and dismiss.

As a child I thought I needed to be a boy to be attracted to girls, and so I secretly desired to be a boy. As I woman, I've learned I can be a woman who loves women, and I do love being a Woman as much as I love

being Black. Both my Womanhood and my Blackness are me, they define important aspects of who I am, why I've had to struggle in this society, and why I often feel like Mother Earth or a piece of dust on it.

Though the war has changed, it's still an everyday battle combating the homophobia I confront on a daily basis. But I will live my life in accordance with nature. Just as being a Black person, and a Woman, cannot be changed, (and I would not change if I could), neither can the fact that I love loving women be changed. Because loving women is as natural, to me, as the color of my skin.



SUPPORT GROUPS

African-American Lesbians 40+, for more information call Brenda, (510) 465-2573.

African-American Women with Cancer meets every other Monday, 6:30-8:30pm at the Women's Cancer Resource Center, 3023 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley. Info: (510) 548-9272.

BAYBLAG (Bay Area Black Lesbians and Gays) meet to network, socialize, educate, do political work, have fun. Info: Midgett (415) 648-3658.

Black Female Couples with Children. East Bay and SF locations. Single moms are welcome. Info: Erika or Elisha, (510) 293-0711.

Bisexual People of Color Caucus — Info: Lani, (415) 821-3534.

Black Lesbian Support Group for women in multicultural relationships. Meets 1st Sunday of month in Oakland. Info: (510) 839-3302/ 653-5732.

Black Woman's Support Group for Rape and Incest Survivors: Give and get validation; share feelings and similar experiences; understand how the hurt still affects you; develop sisterhood. Led by Derethia C. Dual, MFCC with 15 years experience as an individual and couples therapist. Wednesday evenings from 6:30-8:30; Future Worlds Foundation Center, 4171 Piedmont Ave, Oakland (across from Piedmont Theatre). For more info call (510) 652-9918.

Lesbians of Color/Third World Lesbian Support Group: meets Thursdays, 6:30-8pm; \$3 donation (no one turned away); Pacific Center, Telegraph and Derby, Berk. For info call Camille Barber, (510) 548-8283.

Lesbians with Cancer meets 1st/3rd Tuesday at the Lyon-Martin Women's Health Services, 1748 Market St. #210, S.F. 6-8pm. Info: (415) 548-9272.

Lesbian Relationship Coaching for Women of Color and Interracial couples: Weekends, group evenings, individual and couples sessions. Understanding what

All listings with the exception of SERVICE and JOB LISTINGS are free of charge to lesbians of African descent.

SERVICE & JOB LISTINGS- 25 words or less costs \$20 per issue. Any message over 25 words will cost an additional \$20. Listings should not exceed 50 words.

FLYER INSERTS: To insert a flyer for mailing with the Aché journal, \$25-100 donation to help cover postage. For more information contact Adelia at (510) 849-2819

makes a relationship great isn't enough. Discovering and implementing what we know works is the challenge. Come discover new ways of being in relationships that will dramatically enhance your chances of creating the kind of relationship you want. Sonika Tinker and Debra Rein LoveWorks Inc. Call: (415) 572-1999.

Multi-Cultural Bisexual Lesbian Gay Alliance: UC Berkeley. Women's social group every Thurs. 8-10pm. Women's Resource Center Library (Golden Bear Bldg. 2nd floor). All women invited for film nights, conversation, community sensuality, debates, play, and more....

SISTAH SISTAH: A lesbian/bisexual women of color support/social/rap group at UC Berkeley. Meets weekly. For more info call the Women's Resource Center at (510) 642-4786.

Women Embracing Life (Women and HIV) meet Mondays 6:45-9pm at The Women's Building, 3543 - 18th St., S.F.

Young Women of Color (lesbian, bisexual and questioning ages 23 and under) meet Fridays 7-9pm at the Lyon Martin Women's Health Services, 1748 Market St., #201, S.F. Info: (415) 565-7681 or (415) 703-6150.

Zebra Brigade (black & white lesbian couples). SF location. For info: Anita or Lorie (415) 641-5980; Naomi (415) 821-9972.

ORGANIZATIONS

Aché Project — An organization for lesbians of African descent produces a quarterly international journal, a variety of cultural events and other projects in the Bay Area. We invite women with energy and ideas to come join us. For more information: (510) 849-2819 or write to Aché at 3122 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, CA 94705.

Gay & Lesbian Sierra Club — We car-pool to easy day hikes, brunches, camping, bike riding, tide pooling, moonlight walks, ski trips, some are women-only, all are friendly. Call recording at (510) 653-5012 or send \$12 for a year membership of six newsletters. GLS/Bay Chapter, 5237 College Ave., Oakland, CA 94618.

The NIA Collective is welcoming prospective new members. Many women who attended the 1992 gathering expressed an interest in working on future gatherings. This is your opportunity. We welcome you to bring your questions, energy and enthusiasm. For details, please call: (510) 763-3969.

LGADDA, Lesbians and Gays of African Descent for Democratic Action is a new independent organization dedicated to the political empowerment of African American lesbians and gays. Annual membership \$20/\$10 fixed income. Our general membership meetings are held from 7:30-9pm on every third Thursday of the month at 507B Divisadero St. in San Francisco. Come join us for some serious discussions and lively debates!! For more information contact LGADDA, 584 Castro St., Suite 130, San Francisco, CA 94114-2588.

SUPPORT GROUPS

BLACK WOMEN'S STUDIES: "All the women are white, all the Blacks are men, but some of us are brave." Black's women's study group forming for twice-monthly meetings beginning in July. Read the history/literature of those who came before us in the company of your sisters. Enthusiasm, an open mind, and a loving spirit required. All women of African descent welcome. Free. For more information contact Blake at (510) 654-4068.

WOC BOOK DONATION

REQUESTED — Imagine travelling 2 days by train to gain access to literature by women writers of color from the states. Imagine not being able to read the most recent anthologies, collections, and journals by women of color feminists until 2-5 years after publication. Sumita Parmar is a feminist/scholar from Allahabad, India currently in the states working with Barbara Christian on black feminist literary criticism—as part of her larger research on women of color and feminist movements. Books by women of color writers (particularly works by Native American, Chicana/Latina, Asian Pacific and African American women) are scarce and very difficult to obtain in India. If you have duplicate copies or any books by women writers of color from the states that you would like to donate to Sumita, please send them c/o SKYE WARD, Box 4718, Berkeley, CA 94704-0718. S.F. Bay Area donors may arrange to have the books picked up by calling (510) 874-4794 or if you're in the neighborhood you may drop the books through the Aché office mail slot at 3122 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley (across the street from La Peña Cultural Center.) May the circle be unbroken..

SISTREN LIBRARY — Announcing the creation of Sistren Library, a privately owned collection of books by Black women poets. No profit is made from this collection. It is designed to serve as an archive for those books which are lost all too soon. We want to know about your books! To be included in the library, you need only to have published one book of poetry. Send your name, book title(s), price(s) and a contact address. We will almost always purchase a copy of each book from you or your publisher. Our words are disappearing. Help to preserve them. Librarian/Owner, Jacquelyn Cenacveira. SISTREN LIBRARY, P.O. Box 57634, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413. phone: (818) 981-5022.

Beginners Insight Meditation Group forming for Women of Color.

Instruction, group meditation, discussion and support. Free. Please call Vega at (415) 821-2180.

Sisters! Join the Bay Area's only women of color martial arts class at the Hand-To-Hand Community Arts Center, taught by Winn Gilmore. Fridays:

6-7:30pm, Sundays: 11-12:30pm. Hand-To-Hand C.A.C., 5680 San Pablo Ave., Oakland. Childcare, and car-pooling can be arranged. For more information call Yvonne, (510) 874-4940.

For Colored Girls Who Dare To

Create Drama! Sapphire Theatre Co. is offering up and coming acting workshops (for beginners especially.) The classes are designed to create a firm foundation of acting skills, improvisation, voice, and physical skills. For information call (510) 653-4945 and leave your name and number.

Producers Wanted!!! Aché is looking for women with experience in producing events who are interested in working on Aché fundraisers. If you'd like to get involved please phone (510) 849-2819 or send your name, phone number, and production interests/experience to Events c/o Aché, 3122 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, CA 94705.

Brainy, Artsy Gals - A monthly art salon for lesbians only. Come share a light potluck, socializing, and the sharing and appreciation of art by Bay Area lesbians. Anyone interested in participating, please contact Leslie at (415) 824-4401.

PERSONALS

GBF, non-smoker, drug free, social drinker seeks other compatible females 50-65 in close proximity to Maryland or surrounding areas (Washington, Virginia, Delaware, New York, etc.) for friendship, travel, etc. Please write: Marty Williams, P.O. Box 265, Randallstown, MD 21133.

Single, Black Lesbian, looking to connect with other positive single GBF's nationwide especially NY/Tri-State area who are interested in friendship and who enjoy traveling etc. Lesbian only, please, no bisexuals. For information, please write: Travel 'N' Style, P.O. Box 524150 Stadium, Bronx, N.Y. 10452

PUBLICATIONS

ACHÉ: A JOURNAL FOR LESBIANS OF AFRICAN DESCENT is a quarterly journal featuring the writings and artwork of black lesbians throughout the diaspora. Subscription: \$16-25/yr. Aché, 3122 Shattuck

Ave., Berkeley, CA 94705. Phone: (510) 849-2819.

ALTERNATIVES — This Los-Angeles based quarterly features a variety of profiles, interviews and articles with their own special flair. Check it out! Subscription: \$9.95/yr. Alternatives, 1283 S. La Brea #235, Los Angeles, CA 90019.

BLK: a national black lesbian and gay news-magazine featuring profiles & interviews, excellent coverage of current events, and a comprehensive media watch. Single issue: \$2. Subscription: \$18/yr./\$30/2 yrs. BLK, Box 83912, Los Angeles, CA 90083-0912. Phone: (213) 410-0808.

BLACK LACE — an erotic quarterly from BLK publications. Crossing over the threshold of the politically correct to another, more intimate kind of sisterhood. "Let's celebrate," says editor Alycee Lane. "Let us share our fantasies frankly, honestly even brutally...to hell with what we've taught ourselves to think. Pledge allegiance to your entire black woman selves." Single copy: \$6. Subscription: \$20 yr./\$36-2 yrs. Black Lace, Box 83912, Los Angeles, CA 90038-0912. Phone: (213) 410-0808/fax (213) 410-9250.

KUUMBA is a literary magazine for lesbians and gay African Americans. The quarterly features poetry from across the country and from Africa as well. It's name comes from one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa, meaning "creativity." Single issue: \$4.50. Subscription: \$15 yr./\$28-2 yrs. KUUMBA, Box 83912, Los Angeles, CA 90083-0912.

PLANET ROC: An Alternative Arts Journal — is the neatest art zine to ever hit your mailbox! Featuring art, poetry, articles, and short stories by people like you! Subscription: \$5 for 6 issues. PLANET ROC, P.O. Box 476996, Chicago, IL 60647-6996.

THING (She Knows Who She Is) —

This quarterly "zine" published out of Chicago features a wild variety of profiles, interviews, gossip and other fun stuff. Subscription: \$7 for 3 issues & \$14 for 6 issues. THING, 2151 W. Division, Chicago, IL 60622-3056. phone: (312) 227-1780/fax (312) 227-1886.

ULOAH — A Publication of United Lesbians of African Heritage. To become a member of ULOAH and receive the quar-

terly newsletter mail your name and address with check/money order for \$10 annual membership payable to ULOAH, 1626 No. Wilcox Ave. #190, Los Angeles, CA 90028.

SERVICES

Psychic Astrologer - Astrological readings, analysis of strengths, weaknesses, and the child within... Call Clea (415) 292-7267.

Sandra Lobby, MSW, psychotherapist—interested in working with clients of color. Micaela Lovett, supervisor. License MFC 23665. Sliding Scale. (510) 534-5006

SUBMISSIONS WANTED

COLLECTION ON BLACK ARTS & CULTURE: art criticism, interviews, critical essays, graphics, letters, experimental writing, visual art work, reviews of performances, books, art, theories, profiles... Max 30pp, all articles should be typed or neatly printed. Send B&W photographs/photocopies—do not send originals. Particular interest in submissions reflecting the Black Canadian experience. Articles from unpublished writers are strongly encouraged. Send a SASE to: At the Crossroads: A Journal for Women of African Descent c/o Karen Augustine, PO Box 317, Station P, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2S8, Canada

Black Lesbian Culture Book being compiled. Seeking past and present photographs, names, organizations, anecdotes and rumors, song titles and lyrics, publications, notes on personal style, lovemaking tips, recipes, black and white artwork, references, herstory and heroes, conferences, ANYTHING by, about, for Black Lesbians. Also need fund-raising ideas! Contact Terri Jewell, PO Box 23154, Lansing, MI 48909, or call (517) 485-3500 anytime.

"Of Many Cultures: An Anthology of Writings by Women of Mixed Heritage." Seeking poetry and prose, fiction and non-fiction; autobiographical essays; art and photographs; interviews; essays on issues of race, culture, politics and identity. Contact Jenna Vest, 1432 Fifth Ave., Oakland, CA 94606 — phone: (510) 834-4857.

Multi-cultural Lesbian Relationships

Anthology. First-person writings, cassettes of dialogues O.K. Can request interview. Some topics of interest: racism within and outside relationship; having/raising children; socializing/friendships; language differences, etc. Contact: Rene Dawson & Terri Jewell, co-editors, P.O. Box 23154, Lansing, MI 48909. SASE required with all correspondence.

Calling All Bisexual Women—a call for written and visual work for the first anthology published in Canada by and about bisexual women. At least half of this anthology will be written and produced by women of color. We are excited and honored that it will be published by SISTER VISION PRESS, a Black Women and Women of Colour Press. Send a SASE to Bisexual Women's Anthology, c/o Sister Vision Press, P.O. Box No. 217, Str. E, Toronto, Ontario M6H 4E2.

Mixed-race/ Light Skinned?

Autobiographical contributions, text and visuals, for book by mixed-race/ light skinned Black lesbians. For further info contact: SS, c/o BM 4390, London WC1N 3XX, England.

TOUGH DOVE BOOKS is looking for lesbian adventure stories for an anthology, stories about wild women, eccentric characters, sexual exploits, travel, sci-fi, true life experience, everyday tales, exciting events, fiction and nonfiction. Enclose SASE. Previously unpublished writers encouraged. Manuscripts must be double spaced and will not be returned. ASCII (DOS text) file format on IBM PC compatible OK. Send to: Mikaya, 11101 Eastside Road, Ukiah, CA. 95482.

Women in the Moon has changed the submission dates and fees for the Pat Parker Memorial Poetry Award, for the Woman in the Moon Poetry Prize and for regular seasonal submissions to the company. Submission dates for the Pat Parker Memorial Poetry Award will be accepted from May 1 to July 31 of each year. The submission fee is \$10.00. Poems will be accepted for the Woman in the Moon Poetry contest from January 1 to March 31. The submission fee will be \$5.00. Manuscript submissions to Woman in the Moon will be accepted beginning January 1 and ending on April 30. The submission fee is \$7.00. Woman in the Moon accepts the work of gay people, women, prisoners, African Americans, and those people who find it dif-

ficult to place their work. Work should focus on any experience of enlightenment, hope, peace, joy, and trust. Woman in the Moon gives full editorial reports on all poetry submissions. For further information or to request a free catalog phone or write: Woman in the Moon 2215-R Market Street, Box 137 San Francisco, CA. 94114 (408) 253-3329

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Jackie 11 '93

"Ache." Aché, vol. 5, no. 2, summer 1993. Archives of Sexuality and Gender, link.gale.com/apps/doc/BEYZVX358253268/AHSI?u=umuser&sid=bookmark-AHSI&xid=2ac94c67. Accessed 8 Dec. 2022.